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# AS HE PASSED BY

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ALLAN KNIGHT CHALMERS

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AS HE PASSED BY

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*To*  
THE BROADWAY TABERNACLE CHURCH

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## CHAPTER I

### ON THE EDGE OF THE CROWD

WE have always judged Jesus by the inner circle; the inner circle of discipleship and the inner circle of opposition. We talk of Peter and James and John, of Thomas and Judas, of—of—Matthew, of—of—of Philip—more “ofs” before we say Andrew, and—and—“Oh, who were the rest of them anyway?” “There followed Him great multitudes of people;” but we talk of His effect upon *those who stayed behind* after the crowd went and became His violent partisans, leaving all to follow Him.

Or we judge Him by those who reacted violently against Him and His message. There is an old proverb about “fear the man who has no enemies,” or something like that. “I’ve never met him,” a man said to me about another man, “but I think I would like him from the kind of enemies he has.”

This is a valid way to judge a man. Read some time that poem of Alfred Noyes, “The Death of a Great Man.”<sup>1</sup> You may lose its point in the

<sup>1</sup> Reprinted by permission of Frederick A. Stokes Company. Copyright, 1915.

compressed drive of poetry; it is better to tell it as a prose scene.

He starts off by saying that the realization of the greatness of a man comes not in the sense of shock "that he is dead," as you see the news in headlines. That means so little. We all know that because we have ourselves said, all in the same breath, "Wasn't that sudden about ——?" and, "Did you bring the jigsaw puzzle?" Noyes in more universal phrase writes, "So he is dead," and "Is it going to rain?" Neither is it that we fly flags at half mast for a month while orators say, "All the world stands weeping at his tomb."

"London is dining, dancing through it all,  
And in the unchecked smiles along the street  
Where men, that lightly knew him, lightly meet,  
There is no jot of grief, no tittle of pain."

We had to break forth into poetry there a bit.

"No," says Noyes. "The greatness of a man is told by two things: the pride of those who glory in life because they knew him; and that strange, that 'dreadful light' upon many faces—the peace [the relieved peace] upon the faces of his foes.'"

Let us be careful not to exaggerate this truly wise observation about life. The person who tests his life, as some do, mainly by the opposition he arouses is not quite sane. If you are interested



in truth, if you believe there is a right way of life, you do not want people to fight you. Nor do you want to spend your time and energy in defense of a position. It may be necessary to engage in a struggle for the truth you believe, but it should not be enjoyable for one who has any clear idea of the goal to be attained. Opposition is distasteful to men on the march. Who, knowing the goal to be reached and feeling the need of haste in getting people there, can be so stupid as to enjoy the friction of guerrilla warfare as he travels the way? Only people not sure of the end enjoy the struggle by the way; because that allows them to be occupied with apparently important business and postpones the ultimate exposure of their ignorance.

Noyes is, however, right so far: A man's greatness is tested by the love he arouses and the hate he causes. We can see that these two tests are made in the life and death of Jesus. Right it is that we think and talk of Jesus mainly in His influence upon partisan and opponent. Obviously we have to. You cannot talk of things off the record. As fellow-citizen Smith wisely used to point out, we have to "go to the record." But in that judgment we must not forget the entries in the record so lightly made that we often neglect them.

There is a third test. What does Jesus do to

those who choose neither the high road nor the low road? What is the effect upon "the rest" who, "in between, on the misty flats, . . . drift to and fro"? What does He do to the man on the edge of the crowd who never comes into the inner circle of discipleship?

It is well for us to probe with a sympathetic and disciplined imagination into His effect upon the casually mentioned in His record. It is not hard to understand why Nicodemus hesitated on the edge of the crowd; but why did not Lazarus become a more vital adherent of His cause? And Barabbas, what effect did Jesus have on him?<sup>2</sup> What happened to the centurion and to the rich young ruler?

We do not doubt that Jesus disturbed them. This was one of His constants. He troubled men. The word is hardly strong enough. He made them wonder about themselves. He made them question life as they knew it. In the case of so many it seemed to make no immediate difference in what they did, but there was that feeling one has that they were never quite the same again. He put the element of discontent into life. That sounds queer to say about Him who spoke of the peace of God. Yet it is true that there is no peace

<sup>2</sup> Edward Arlington Robinson's *Nicodemus* and Sarah Field's *Barabbas* are of interest for those who desire to go further with these ideas.



except in that radical reorganization and centralizing of man's whole manner of life upon the idea of the perfect.

Jesus, therefore, by the very nature of truth, added the element of discontent to man—discontent with himself. Louis the Great once said to Massillon the court preacher, "Massillon, I have heard many great preachers and have gone away satisfied with them. But every time I have heard you I have gone away dissatisfied with myself." Massillon was a good witness of Him in whose name he spoke. If we are rightly to represent Him in this world, we must add that element of divine discontent to life.

But we must do more than that. Unless at last we win transformation in the multitude, we have no final message. To remain content through eternity with the rôle of court jester or chaplain to man, the King, would be absurd. Unless we gain adherence in the multitude to our faith, we are only a respectable gesture on the Great White Way, as is *one* (and *only one*) Jew in a fashionable club a pretense of a tolerance which emphasizes our intolerance. Our acceptance of a fact—that the multitude prefers the House of Paramount to the House of God, should not become for us a complacency. *True*, we do not want the multitude to come because we have catered to any low desire which cheapens our emphasis. *True*,



we would rather have ten convinced followers than a thousand nominal ones. But when we discover, as we do, that these who do come out of the crowd and become disciples are truly representative of the multitude—not better but of the rank and file of the crowd—it does not lower the value of these we know. It expresses instead faith in the fundamental goodness of men and their hunger and thirst after reality and puts in our minds the pain of a wonder about why we cannot get all men to see as these who were so shortly of that crowd now see. When we look upon some of those who last month, or last year, or last decade, were lost in this same throng who now pass by but are not of that crowd today, having become instead vital in the inner circle of some fellowship, it makes us ache for greater insight and a more compelling passion. “Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?” Jeremiah cries in his Lamentations. Jesus must often have quoted these words. Passionately, the same theme breaks out as He weeps over Jerusalem. Flandrin, the French painter, has a picture of Christ looking down on, not the flat roofs of ancient Jerusalem, but the factory smokestacks and murky tenements of a modern city. In His eyes still are tears and His lips say, O “thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children to-

gether, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not."

The multitudes did, and must still, cause His heart to ache. It is quite legitimate to try to think His thoughts after Him. We take first an anonymous member of the crowd with which to illustrate. We shall at least know the names of some whom we talk about. But this first one has no name. He was only one from the edge of the crowd. And it is of those who come out of the crowd for a moment only—of those who looked over the shoulders of others from the edge, that we are striving to get understanding now.

That scene of the rich young ruler coming out of the crowd is so typical of our moods. "Master, . . . why, you are a Master!" (he says it with a tone of increased surprise, realizing, after he has said it, how much truer it is than he had thought) "Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Then, when Jesus told him, he went away sorrowful, because he had great possessions.

The disciples must have thought about it many times:

"What was the trouble with that rich young ruler?"

"Why did Jesus send him away? At least He might have been easier on him in the beginning."

"Couldn't we have used his money, though!"



"And it would have helped with the Four Hundred if we had corralled him!"

"It's all very well to talk about this business of the meek and lowly, but we must take man as he is. Man plays 'follow the leader,' and that young fellow was a bellwether if ever I saw one."

One of them must have said to Him once, "We don't mean to criticize, but, really, you know, we needed that young fellow—what was his name?—you remember, the one that came after that street crowd the other day. He's joined the Temple of the Heavenly Rest instead of coming in with us.

"And while I'm at it, Master, do you think it quite wise to carry your principle of freedom so far that you will continue to alienate some of these people brought up on the ceremonial law on Sabbath observance?"

Yes, they must have said something like that. And Jesus must have—oh, I hope He did think about him too. He believed He could speak the truth—full, strong, uplifting. Man must be free of fear—user, not prisoner of possessions. But this young man shrank from it. It is so clear that he shrank from it. Is man so weak then, that he must be shielded from the light? Thus His mind must have gone back longingly to that rich young ruler:

"It is not enough that men who have nothing should see that having nothing is not of all things most dreadful. It is not enough that desperate men should try my way because they have no other way they can try. Life is only worthy as it is chosen. Some of these who follow me, fine though their spirits are, are following because it is the only open door. But the way is truly tested only when men have many doors they might enter, and choose the One."

There is a striking word picture in John Middleton Murry's *Jesus, Man of Genius*, which we should not forget. It pictures the lonely God at the end of a long corridor behind a great curtain waiting for man to come near enough so that God can speak to him. In beautiful prose Murry makes you feel the awful tension of man's footsteps sounding hollowly on the bare floor of the echoing corridor as man dares a little farther toward the deepening gloom of the corridor's end. Time and again God's aching heart longed for man to pass the curtain that the Word might be spoken, but always there was fear at the end and retreating footsteps until Jesus came and, daring to pass the veil, the lonely heart of God was at rest. It is a striking picture. At the risk of marring its solemn simplicity, however, I always add, when that scene is pictured, doors in the corridor, through which man might go, if he



liked. A library door, a game room, a carefree party, where there is dancing and light laughter and good companions. Oh, bad ones too, because the doors of sinister delight and soft allure are open there as man goes down the corridors of time.

Murry's picture needs this truth. It is more realistic. God is not a lonely, desperate searching in the dark. He must be chosen over many things which are good in themselves though not enough in themselves.

How often Jesus must have thought of things like this! He gives us hint of it in His parable of the pearl of great price for which a man sold everything that he might gain that bit of beauty and true value. His mind steeped in the words of His race's religious experience might have dwelt in this connection upon the song of the chosen people in captivity. "If I prefer not thee, oh *Holy City of God*, above my chief joy." There is the test of any truth, of any way, of any life: that it is chosen—preferred—above many joys—above the "chief" joy. It was well said by some one, "The secret of life is to discover what one will put before oneself."

And here on the edge of the crowd was one who was worthy of the test but who failed then. I wish we knew the end. What did the rich young



ruler do? What is he doing today? Will he ever become what Jesus saw in him?

Our minds go on to think of many stories which stop all too soon in the record. If the story stopped in Pilate's Court, how tragic the failure of Peter's life would have been! If night had closed down like a stage curtain on Jerry McAuley lying in a gutter, and no day had ever risen, the world would have had only the memory of a "Bowery bum" to document its pessimism. You ring the curtain down on any life you know at this moment and you will not have cause for exuberant belief in man. Out of a world of chaos and despair, of prejudice and pessimism, we have come; back to that world in a moment or two we shall go. With what faith in man, what passion to rest not until the multitude sees what we see, do we go?

How He did it we do not know, but that He did it we can see. And because He did it, we are led to wonder and to hope that His faith in man as a vessel into which truth could be poured was justified. He, the daring joy of the world, stood in the midst of the crowd. He found men with eyes who saw not; with ears but heard not; with life who lived not; with health but were not well; with wealth but were not rich. They stood in the midst of time and forgot it was a part of eternity—and they were afraid.

But there in the midst of the crowd He sent forth His light, confident that men would choose it in the end—that the darkness could not blot it out. He would not say it about Himself, but for all men over whom the light passed it was true: men were sometimes apparently worse because they feared—but they were different. A quatrain which sticks in the back of my mind says it:

“I saw Him once—He stood a moment there.  
He spake one word that laid my spirit bare.  
He grasped my hand then passed beyond my ken.  
But what I was, I shall not be again.”

He dared to wait. The hardest thing to learn about man is the truth that love never faileth. Ever faileth in the ticking of the clock. Will fail tomorrow. Did fail yesterday. But never faileth. There is an old proverb about the British Empire. She loses every battle but the last. The Kingdom of Love is like that sometimes it seems—ever faileth until the end.

We are to catch some moments out of the moving picture of life in the passing throng about Jesus. In almost every case they seem to fail—at least they only partially succeed. We can read the record of the men of the multitude and recognize in these men our moods and through understanding, not blame, may be able to see ourselves as we too hesitate here On the Edge of the Crowd.



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## CHAPTER 2

### BY NIGHT

How pitiless words are!

*You* say them with an accent. Warm and revealing they tell the truth. They go down on paper and are seen by the eyes of another. They become cold and tell lies.

They can be windows through which we look at the world beyond us and see what is—very little distorted by the glass of our own minds. But they can be mirrors which, when we look upon them, throw back only our own preconceptions and not the facts about what is or was. In fact, sometimes they are the mirrors of some chamber of horrors grotesquely throwing back the appearance of some dwarf, or fiend, or human skeleton or the fat lady in the circus. It is an excellent rule of life when the words of another are repeated to you, particularly if they are whispered, to take account of two things: who repeats the words and why? Then seek beyond that to understand, if you can, why the original person said the words and how. You will in many cases fail to understand with absolute correctness the

meaning of words, since words are symbols of thought and are not accurate; but you will come closer to the truth if you give the benefit of a deep desire to reveal a truth and not to hurt, to any set of words you hear or see.

Such a failure to be fair to a man's intentions and character has been shown in the history of the Church by a phrase which has stamped Nicodemus with the taint of cowardice. That he may have been a moral coward is possibly true, but it is not fair to judge him, as many have so simply done, by the phrase, "by night."

The Bible, which is such a master of condensation at many points, has many spots where the careless reader can be led astray. This phrase, "by night," has a furtive sound. "There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus. . . . The same came to Jesus *by night*."

"Why 'by night'?" men ask. "Because he was afraid to be seen," they answer or are answered. Some people skip four chapters and refer to a passage where others were afraid to speak to Jesus "for fear of the Jews." This, they say, was the reason why Nicodemus sneaked in secretly (these words note are not in the account) to see Jesus "by night."

But is it impossible to think of the words except dishonorably? Change the translation to "one evening." The mood is now different. Nico-



demus, a busy man hurrying from his office on Main Street to the Temple, where as a vestryman he was to meet his minister, Caiaphas, at the monthly board meeting of the Church Committee (the anachronisms are intentional), saw a street preacher in the square. He was standing on a soapbox and answering the questions of the crowd. Nicodemus had often seen these "crackpots," as he called them, but something about this man struck him and he stopped for a moment. He had to move on directly because the Church Committee was gathering and he should not be late; but while his feet hurried on the way again, his mind lagged behind. There was something about that man. What was it they called him? Jesus. Yes, that's it. Now I remember. Joseph, who had come down from his new estate up in the country at the last meeting of the board, was telling me about having heard him speak at an open-air meeting up on the mountainside. I'll ask Joseph about him.

Joseph was at the meeting, having come down from Arimathaea, and Nicodemus asked him about Jesus.

"Yes, I remember him well," said Joseph. "He is staying, I believe, at Lazarus' place. I was interested in him. In fact, I'm hoping to have a talk with him sometime. He's got something in what he says that is different."



"Better not let Pilate hear about that," laughed Nicodemus. "He'll think you are a Red and will get his committee on the investigation of Un-Roman activities after you." They grinned at each other as the meeting was called to order.

During the report of the treasurer of the committee on missionary churches, Nicodemus got to thinking: I believe I'll look up that man Jesus. I'd like to see what his slant is on some of these old questions we are always discussing.

After the meeting he told Caiaphas what he was thinking of doing. "All right," said Caiaphas, a bit doubtfully, "but if you do, come on up to the house afterward and tell me what he says. I'll be working late anyway on my annual report for the Sanhedrin."

And so "that evening"—what a different sound the words "by night" now have!—Nicodemus called on Jesus at the home of friends where he was staying and they talked together.

But now, having taken that bitter edge off the words "by night," let's not say that the fact might not yet be so—that Nicodemus had preferred darkness for his interview with Jesus. We do not need to accuse him of cowardice to say, "Why not?" We are dishonest with the facts if we assert that there are no differences in difficulty for one man over another in the facing of

the truth. It is a simpler matter individually and socially for a fisherman by the Sea of Galilee to leave his nets than it is for a member of the Sanhedrin to be an inquirer after truth. The outcaste in India and the coolie in China have different problems from the Brahmin, from the members of the literati, in accepting Christianity. A bachelor wage-earner has no *more* obligation to seek the way to solve the great problems of an unchristian civilization than has the head of the factory. But there is less involved in any decision for him. Nicodemus, we must not forget, was a member of the Sanhedrin. He was in the public eye. To come openly might have been proper; but because of the influence of his acts on the public opinion it was not improper for him to remember that he was looked at and looked to, and he must not be careless with that fact.

While, therefore, it may have been true that Nicodemus came to Jesus by night as a protection from prying eyes, even if that were his purpose, we cannot blame him. It was not to be expected that he could jump hither and yon with every voice that cried from the wilderness or in the streets.

The astonishing thing is that Nicodemus came at all. We so often do not do even that. We hear the call of human need. We do not heed.



We see a world impossibly different from our professions of faith. Spasmodically we do something about it—particularly in emergencies. Tornado relief calls, floods and famines, volcanoes will cause us to think of distress and need. But to do it all the time, every day, in office and factory? Wait a second—that's too much to expect!

But Nicodemus had the sense to realize that in the perplexities of the world, here was a man speaking with authority. He seemed to know something: a way of living. There was implied in what he said a correction for the evils of the world. Touched by a haunting something Jesus had, Nicodemus came.

What did they talk about? The account is so brief. Perhaps they talked long about the difficulties of living in the world as it is and attaining in that world an ideal. At least Jesus' words sound like a conclusion.

Except a man be born again ("from above" is also a proper translation). Except a man be born again—and this time from above—he cannot see the kingdom of God.

Now, at this point, Nicodemus represents by his reaction almost all men. He has lived long enough to know his weakness—or, at least, to know that he *is* weak. He thinks he knows his nature—this nature of man which he has often

said, "You cannot change. . . ." He knows how much with him in every thought and act this world is with its intricacies and insistences. Lost, bogged down, buried in the prison of the world and the flesh, with the devil his jailer, is man—and I am one of them.

It has an unreasonable sound to it, you see: You can be a new creature. This is obviously not sound thinking, not sane speaking; and Nicodemus so answers. He says exactly the same words twice: "How can . . . ?" How can a man be born again? How can these things—being born again—be? The accent is probably without question different each time.

"How *can* a man be born again?" is his first reaction. It is impossible. First, last, and all the time it is the nature of man to think of himself. First and last at least he does think of himself—if not all the time. "The first law of nature is self-preservation" is a proverb experience teaches us. If at the last I don't look out for myself nobody else will, is also a bitter truth we have learned. This Nicodemus *felt*. *This* he probably said.

The process of change in his accent is easy for us to conjecture but not important for us to take up now in any detail. The fact is evident that Nicodemus came, in that conversation, to have no argument with the need and the possibility of a



man becoming a new creature. This does not need to be a denial of nature. It is a fulfillment of nature. It gives man's life dignity. There is significance to it. A man gives up his life for his friend, loves his enemy, swears to his own hurt, for a truth he believes. There is a rightness to life when these things happen. Nicodemus knows, not being able to tell whence the knowledge comes nor whither it will lead him, that a man can and must be born again.

His question is the same in form but now different in accent. How? *How* can a man be born again? Tell me how I can become this new creature I long to be and which the world needs.

It is not important for us now to try to discover the answer that Jesus gave him. We are trying to see something other than that. We are seeking for the reason why people miss Christ's way; and Nicodemus shows us one of them. Though I have spoken often of this familiar character, it had never occurred to me how minutely similar the conversation between Jesus and the rich young ruler was to this evening's discussion with Nicodemus. The rich young ruler and Nicodemus were from the same class in society. They were rich—and powerful in the social system because of that. They had position—standing in the community. They were accustomed to having respect given to their opinions.



They were cultured men, gracious in manner, easy in their meeting with people. Read again the two stories yourself to see the sameness of approach in the rich young ruler's courteous "Good master," and Nicodemus's "Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God." They both wanted to know about the good life and what its meaning was. They both wanted to know how to get it. "What shall I *do* to inherit eternal life?"

And they missed Christ's way—not because of the riches but because they trusted too much to them. It was too great a change for them to accept, if it meant they would lose what they had.

Out from that conversation in the evening with the mind which lifted the darkness of man's life, Nicodemus came. He walks the streets, so familiar, as if he were in a strange town. He remembers Caiaphas up working late and decides to go to him. He finds him in his home waiting and troubled at the possible influence on this leading member of the community. They talk.

And now let E. A. Robinson complete the picture from his great character sketch of Nicodemus:<sup>1</sup>

"We are afraid,  
Caiaphas; and our flawed complacency  
Is a fool's armor against revelation.

<sup>1</sup> From *Collected Poems*, "Nicodemus." Reprinted by permission of The Macmillan Company.

Why must we turn ourselves away from it?  
If you and I together should stand with him,  
For all to see, who knows what we should see!"

Caiaphas replies:

"We might see stones flying to find our heads,  
For one thing, Nicodemus. You are mad.  
Say to your carpenter that he is mad,  
Or say what else you will . . .  
When this absurdity has overblown  
Its noise, and is an inch of history  
That a few may remember, you will come back.  
There is a covenant that has not changed,  
And cannot change. You will not go from us  
For a mad carpenter, . . . for you are one of us,  
And you will save yourself at the last hour;  
And you will be as wary of Messiahs  
Henceforth as I am."

"Nicodemus  
Trembled and held his cloak with clutching hands  
As if it were his life, . . . feeling it  
Only as darkness that he could not see.  
All he could see through tears that blinded him  
To Caiaphas, to himself, and to all men  
Save one, was one that he had left alone,  
Alone in a bare room, and not afraid."

Recall Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount:  
"If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness,  
how great is that darkness." And Nicodemus  
stayed for a while at least on the edge of the  
crowd.

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## CHAPTER 3

### RECALLED TO LIFE

IT is from the book by Dickens, not the movie, that our topic comes. "Recalled to Life." No movie can give the haunted feeling which the genius of Dickens creates through those words. The movies have learned how to portray inner feeling, as any who have seen *The Informer* will agree; but ordinarily that medium deals with surfaces and misses the spiritual fourth dimension which literature deals with as naturally as a groceryman does with small change. Read the first book—not more than fifty pages it is—only a prologue in length really—read the first book of *A Tale of Two Cities*. Recalled to life. Again that apparently exotic, really endemic phrase sends chills up and down your spine. Recalled to life. We feel again the horror of the fact. A man buried alive eighteen years in a prison. No contact with the outside world, no word from any friend. The ghostly conversation goes on.

"You had abandoned all hope of being dug out?"

"Long ago."



"You know you are recalled to life."

"They tell me so."

"I hope you care to live?"

"I can't say."

We travel once more in the mail coach with Mr. Lorry as he tosses and sways through the mist. The voice cannot give this. You must read the book to understand—to feel it. The form of the man he goes to bring back into the world is before our fascinated eyes as through his tired ones we see almost as in a dream the prison. Mr. Lorry feels he is digging him out of a grave, a grave in which he would prefer to stay. This wretched creature! earth hanging from his face, his hair—man of so many faces, which is true? Wasted and worn—sunken cheeks, ghastly gray. Pride, bitterness, rage, despair, abandoned hope, indifference—the peace of being locked in a cell. "Recalled to life." "I hope you care to live." Cares to live? Of course he doesn't. He has abandoned life—long ago. Recalled to life.

I hope you care to live? said Jesus to that ruler of the people who came to him one night.

"I can't say," said Nicodemus, recalled to life.

The greatest obstacle to the victory of the spirit over life is that we are not sure we care to live—or if we care, not sure we can. It was no

soft gospel Jesus gave to Nicodemus that night—no easy truth it teaches us.

You must be born again. Before we take that up let's emphasize that this does not mean a second birth alone. Life is not that simple. Not one more chance as some people feel it and that "one more" the last. Even a man can do that—give one other chance to failure.

"You started wrong—poor man!" we say. "The world was too much for you. You lost your way. You bogged down in the muck. You have been buried in the prison of the world, shut in the cell of your own flesh—jailed by the devil. But the world, the flesh, and the devil shall be set aside this once. You can be born again this one time more."

No, it is more than that! Even in a world of nature where moving fingers write and having written move on, the future is not thus celled by the past. Not once forgiven—because one's cheeks are two. Nor seven times, nor seventy times seven, because the numbers are holy. Never forget that never-forsaking spirit of the Christ. Sometimes we wish we could. It is so much easier not to be recalled to life.

But with that reminder made of the infinite love of God, our thought now turns to the present instance. Whatever the distant future holds we cannot prove. This thing is sure. If the king-



dom of God is to come, if you are to take up your residence therein, you must be born again. Not this creature that you are—a new creature you must become. “Except ye be born again ye can not enter into the kingdom of God.” I am not saying this of myself. I only repeat it. He said it.

Jesus wasn’t fooling when He said that. He meant me—and you. We, who from our mother’s arms have absorbed, not her passionate self-forgetfulness in love of her child, but instead allowed her providing concern for our welfare to be our own first concern, have grown up with the so-called law of self-preservation as if it were ingrained in our natures, were our right. But the self (even if we grant its interests to be the first law of nature) is the last law of love.

To have the nature and the right of our lives to think first of the other man—to sail the ocean of this life as the captain of a ship, not just the captain of your own soul—this is what Christ meant. A captain is the last to leave his ship, even though it sinks beneath him. Such an one lives in the spirit of the writer of Hebrews who says, “Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body.” He knows with Debs, who said, “As long as there is a man in prison I am not free,” that so long as anyone



who sails on his ship with him is in danger, he, the captain, has *no* right of self-preservation.

My very illustration of the different code of the captain and his crew from that of the pagan or the rats who proverbially desert a doomed ship, takes away the reasonable sound to Nicodemus's apparently natural reply. "Born again!—How *can* a man be born again? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born? Why, it's against nature."

No, it's not. All of a sudden we do not even have to argue about it. Obviously, it's not against nature. It's a fulfillment of nature. It is the very essence of nature. It gives nature meaning—dignity. Man gives up his life for his friend. Man loves his enemy. Man "swareth to his own hurt and changeth not." Man "seeketh not his own."

Oh, but how can a man be born again? Nicodemus, you see, is the voice of man's experience—questioning—almost querulous. It's impossible, against nature.

For the moment we need not argue. We answer as Jesus did. The wind bloweth and you hear it, feel it. You cannot tell whence it cometh or whither it goeth, but you know it is. So is every man that is born of the Spirit. To try to prove this—that the nature of man is to think of self last, not first, to feel the need of proving

it—is to miss knowing it. But it's grand to see it done.

Every once in a while those sensitive among you know that I walk for you with bedeviled souls on the slippery narrow paths of the edges of hell. Sometimes it is a crowd who go, none knowing the others who walk that same moment in time. I can sometimes do nothing else but walk with them. The journey once begun has oftentimes no turning place. Think, with imagination, of the narrow, winding road in some gloomy mountain pass. Paint it, if you can, with Faustian smoke and red fire, with Doré-esque "horrid shapes and shrieks and sights unholy," because it will help you to feel its horror. Or keep it as simple, if you must, as an automobile journey over a new road on a wet night after the delay of a flat tire makes you finish your journey through the Rocky Mountains in the darkness. Sometimes in this confused life of ours there is no turning back. One goes on and on and knows there is no more argument that is reasonable to turn that bedeviled creature to himself, than a father once had, according to an old story, to make his son see what he was to do with his life until the sour food of pigs was his longing and he knew how low he had fallen. In such times one is only a companion on a journey keep-



ing the lonely, frightened soul from the sense of being completely abandoned.

Then at long last, if you have the patience, that journey is done. As quickly as Dante's *Inferno* turns the travelers by "a path directly to the stars," that person is born again.

I know!

People tell me it cannot be done. That this one at least is far too low, is too completely lost. Clear as the notes triumphant of a great solo—"I know that my Redeemer liveth"—I hear the echo on the sounding board of the flesh of men and women—"I know!" Know what? Know ye can be born again. I've seen it done. This week I've seen it done—last month I saw it done—I know. Not against nature—not too impossible—not too improbable—not too difficult.

Jesus sent out the renewing word—recalled to life. "I hope you care to live."

We descendants of Nicodemus answer, "I cannot say." As Doctor Manette we may feel more secure locked in our accustomed cells making shoes.

But the gospel *has* been proclaimed. You need not be buried there. Ye can be born again.

It is sure that the repetition of Nicodemus's question, "How can a man be born again?" had, the second time, a different accent. Certainly, it is man's experience that his tone of voice, his



stress on words changes as he lives. As Jesus talked with him, Nicodemus may have said as you and I do say—not the first question, “How *can* a man be born again?” but, the same words note—“*How* can a man be born again?” “Oh, it’s true,” the spirit of man now says, not querulous but questioning. “Oh, it’s true. I do believe. I want to be born again. I know I *can* be born again. But *how*? Tell me *how*. *How* can a man be born again?”

Jesus answered, sadly, I think: “Art thou a master in Israel and knowest not these things?” A leader of the people and you ask *how*!

May I tell you *how*? It’s simple really. We have seen how men have done it. Any master in Israel ought to know these things.

*Live close to human need.* “I have seen, I have seen the affliction of my people that are in Egypt, and I have heard their groaning because of their taskmasters, and I have come down to deliver them; and now come, I will send thee into Egypt.” Moses heard the voice of God in the haunting memory of the things he knew.

He was safe on Midian’s hills. Why should he risk his life, his future for slum dwellers of Egypt? I am a shepherd. I have my job. Yet if he had not been born again, there would have been no Promised Land—there and then.

How awful if he had allowed that memory

of human need to die! What if he had overlaid it in his mind as a mother might carelessly—or with intention, who knows?—smother in the cradle an unwanted child? Some other leadership would then have come. Some Aaron alone, with his smooth tongue in cheek, would have let the people serve a golden calf forever. And Moses out on Midian's hills would have told old father Jethro, "I see by the papers that the slums of Egypt are as bad as ever after Aaron's attempt to clean them up. Too bad, but you cannot change human nature."

We seem to solve so little in the beginning, even though we suffer helplessly over things that do not change. Yet this is the way it always begins. Live close to human need. You change thereby, and things do change when you stick to them. Kagawa says that poetically in my favorite out of his *Songs From the Slums*.

THE LAND OF HAN<sup>1</sup>

" 'He cannot save  
Himself'—  
Long ago,  
The crowds  
Reviled a Man  
Who came  
To save them.

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<sup>1</sup> From *Songs From the Slums*, by Toyohiko Kagawa. Copyright, 1935. Used by permission of the publishers, Cokesbury Press.

And I,  
Who fain would follow Him,  
Am spent.  
For I can see  
No hope  
For the slums,  
Because that,  
First of all,  
This thing  
Is wrong—  
That men  
Should crowd  
Thus in the dearth  
And dark,  
And dirt—  
Should crowd and throng.

I would lead them away from their bondage, on, and  
on, and on,  
To the North Land, the Land of Trees, the lovely  
Land of Han;  
Where mosquitoes never torture, and there's never  
pain to bear,  
But flower buds are bursting, and spring is everywhere;  
Where fairy fragrance flutters on the clean, cool  
breeze,  
And tiny, straw-thatched home-huts are nestled 'neath  
the trees;  
Where bonny birds sing gaily in the glory of the dawn,  
And friendly folk fare forth to work each bright and  
happy morn;  
Where the sun shines out in splendor when the white  
mist fades,



Where the crystal streamlets tinkle, and there comes the  
twinkle, twinkle,  
Of the sunlight falling, flashing on the spades.  
Where the hazy purple mountains and the blue, blue  
rivers sing,  
'God is here around you! He is here in everything!'  
Yes; I would lead my people on, and on, and on,  
To the North Land, the Land of Trees, the lovely  
Land of Han!  
But oh, in my heart there is pity,  
For my people must stay in the city,  
And this six-foot shack that shelters me  
Is the only place where I want to be."

If you would be born again, live close to human  
need.

The second step in the "how" of the second  
birth is to put yourself in the way of ideas. Ideas  
are far more dangerous, if you do not want to be  
born again, than human need. For human need  
may bring you at last only to resignation to evil.  
But ideas are persistent and stubborn.

There was a Belgian I met one day in the fight  
around Verdun. He had been away on business  
when the invading German army came in. He  
never got back to his home. No word had come  
from wife or child for three years.

"Don't you hate the Germans?" I said, for I  
had just come up to the lines and was full of that  
twisted idea of war which those who push young

men up to the trenches had given us to aid what they called our morale.

He looked out over the gray, pock-marked mud in which we walked, and ate, and slept; which covered our clothes—and more. A rat scuttled out of one hole and into another. He shrugged his shoulders. “Why?” he said. “We are all in the mud together.”

There may come from human need only despair and resignation. But when an idea gets a hold on you, life changes. Be careful where you live mentally, what ideas you allow to rub elbows with your spirit; because we do “become what we care about and think upon and love.”

In the trenches a young man read some ancient words: “The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.” That is in the fortieth chapter of Isaiah, and the whole chapter is a great passage to get under your skin. Up against the world he knew, this young man put this idea. The idea changed him.

In that haunting and beautiful play *Winter-set*<sup>2</sup>—how anyone can call it a play of slums and sordidness I cannot see—there is seen a boy and a girl older than their years who happen to live amidst gangsters in tenements instead of on Park

<sup>2</sup> By Maxwell Anderson. Reprinted by permission of Anderson House, publishers.



Avenue amidst doormen and tower apartments. The setting is for them only a chance. Life can be equally frustrate and confined on Park Avenue. They are struggling with the glory of great ideas. Being human the personal element influences their actions; but they are moved by ideas just the same.

Then Mio, whose life for ten long years has been absorbed in one idea which, beginning in a search for a truth, had turned sour by his lust to have his father's name revenged, comes to the place where with his revenge sure, he realizes that his hate appeased will hurt his life and the one he loves and those whom she loves. And Miriamne brings Mio to a new birth by the idea of forgiveness. Mio speaks:

I've lost

my taste for revenge if it falls on you. Oh, God,  
deliver me from the body of this death

I've dragged behind me all these years!

Miriamne! Miriamne, if you love me  
teach me a treason to what I am, and have been,  
till I learn to live like a man! I think I'm waking  
from a long trauma of hate and fear and death  
that's hemmed me from my birth—and glimpse a life  
to be lived in hope—but it's young in me yet, I can't  
get free, or forgive! But teach me how to live  
and forget to hate!

MIRIAMNE: He would have forgiven.

MIO: He?



MIRIAMNE: Your father.

(*A pause.*)

MIO: Yes.

(*Another pause.*)

You'll think it strange, but I've never remembered that.

He'd have forgiven—

Then there's no more to say—I've groped long enough

through this everglades of old revenges—here the road ends.—Miriamne, Miriamne, the iron I wore so long—it's eaten through and fallen from me.

As Mio and Miriamne changed, so you and I can be born again if we let our lives be sanctuary for great ideas which the world rejects. In the life about us, in the day we live in, there is a record of a truth. You may have to die for it, if you are to be born again. And the world loves not those who rise from graves where they are safely quiet. But if you want to know *how* to be born again, put yourself in the way of ideas and following Him whom neither death nor life could frighten, answer His cry, "Know ye not that ye must be born again?" You are recalled to life from the edge of the crowd.

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## CHAPTER 4

### A MAN WHO COULDN'T WAIT

WE are not attempting to present an idea in which we move from point to point so that we may arrive inevitably at a Q. E. D. We are going to look at one on the edge of the crowd. We began our thesis with the thought that a life can rightly be judged not only by the allegiance it calls forth and the opposition it brings out, but also by the indifference it fails to overcome. We sometimes fail to be conscious enough of this third test of a way of life.

The major concern of those who believe in the Church's potential contribution to the life of men and society should not be the bitterness of its critics nor in one sense the blindness of its friends, but the fact that the influence it has upon the thought and action of men is in so many cases nonexistent. We are not denying that for many individuals and for large groups of people the Church is a force in which men live and move and have their being. Most of the morning congregations of our churches, and many of the evening, express by lives and would by lips that



for them the Church is not a dead issue. But let us not forget that as an issue it simply does not exist for many people.

There is a famous story about a lawyer who was arguing earnestly before the Supreme Court and the Chief Justice fell asleep. Striking the table the lawyer awoke the judge and said, "Your Honor, how can you give an opinion of my argument if you do not listen to it?" The judge laconically remarked as he closed his eyes again, "Sleep is an opinion!" It is an opinion made by the world today which is not wise to forget or easy to laugh off.

Studdert Kennedy's poem "Indifference" turns our minds perhaps too directly to hungry men upon the street, not because he intended it to but because today that is what we cannot help thinking about as he paints his word picture. For that reason I hesitated to refer you to it. But if you will think of the spiritual rejection which it symbolizes, there is no poem which better expresses this sense of the lonely heart of Jesus who is, now as then, rejected of men. This rejection is not a positive choice but a negative one. The crude and physical agony of the cross was nothing compared to the indifference of the crowd on Main Street as they "pass by."

Let us be careful now not to exaggerate. We need to emphasize again a point of view already

expressed that the person who says he loves opposition is not quite sane. If you are interested in truth, if you believe there is a right way of life, you do not want people to fight you nor do you want to spend your time and energy in defense of a position. These things may be necessary but should not be enjoyable to one who has any clear idea of the goal to be attained. Opposition is distasteful to men on the march. If you know the goal to be reached and the need of haste in getting there, you will not be so stupid that you will enjoy the friction of the struggle to attain. He who knows where he is going is rightly impatient with stupid conflict.

Yet between indifference and opposition we would rightly choose the latter. It was the late Walter Rauschenbusch, himself a critic of the Church of no mean order, who was speaking at a forum when an excited member of the audience interrupted with a tirade against the Church. Professor Rauschenbusch heard him through patiently and when he had finished remarked, "Nobody kicks a dead horse," and went on to speak of the contribution the Church could yet make to the life of the world. When a man cares enough to oppose an idea, there is some hope, if his opposition is based at all upon a desire for the truth and not merely upon the blind opposition of tradition or custom, that you may eventu-



ally see eye to eye with him. Between opposition and indifference the choice is clear.

Barabbas fits in beautifully with this introduction. It was not written to introduce him. The idea is the essential thing and Barabbas its illustration. He reveals an attitude which was characteristic about Jesus in that day and still persists in the world. We need now an introduction of him.

Our minds jump quickly at the hearing of his name to the trial of Jesus. It was the custom to pardon a prisoner at the Jewish Passover. And Pilate, attempting to get out of his dilemma, suggested to the people that he release Jesus. But the crowd cried, "Release unto us Barabbas," and the best-known account, that of John, goes on laconically, "Now Barabbas was a robber."

It is an unfortunate phrase for full understanding since it makes us think of an ordinary sneak thief, of a night prowler for selfish gain. That this emphasis is not true is shown by the other and earlier accounts. Matthew says, "They had a notable prisoner named Barabbas." Mark and Luke speak of the fact that he had been cast into prison for carrying on insurrection in which people, presumably officials, had been killed; and he was awaiting trial for possible murder. It has been conjectured that Barabbas was a leader of the Zealots and in reality a political prisoner

of considerable importance in certain circles, similar, for example, to Eugene Debs in our own times. For demonstration against the Roman rule, and fomenting a riot in which soldiers were killed, and for sedition, he had been thrown into jail.

"Impossible!" some critics say, "because Pilate gave the people choice between Barabbas and Jesus, thinking, of course, they would choose Jesus, since Barabbas was only a common criminal."

Such an interpretation is borne out only by Matthew and is at the same time denied by Matthew, who calls him a "notable" prisoner.

No, the evidence is sufficiently strong for us to assume that this man Barabbas was at least representative of a different way of life; of a different solution of the problem of oppression and injustice.

It has been important to go into the matter of dispute among the authorities about the theories of Barabbas because it helps to get us away from the too glib mental pigeonhole of John: "Now Barabbas was a robber."

We need, then, to add an attitude we have not yet outgrown. In Jesus' day there was an emphasis, at least as strong as today, perhaps much stronger, that the only way of salvation for the oppressed people was violent insurrection. The



fact that the Maccabean revolt had failed did not eliminate the hope. One of the recognized social forces of that day was the Zealots, a group of idealists convinced that the way out was through revolution. You may remember in the movie version of *Ben Hur*, how the young Jewish prince wanted to save Jesus at the end with the intervention of the armed power of the Zealots and his disappointment at the refusal of that aid.

It is hardly conceivable that the way of the Zealots, both because of its ideas and of its personalities, was not a part of Jesus' thought life and had to be decided upon. There are some who believe that one of the temptations of Jesus in the wilderness, that of seeing all the kingdoms of this earth and their glory, was brought vividly to His attention by the Zealots' desire to have Him dramatize and direct their passion for political freedom. "Why spend your talent and ability on this spiritual ideal? Kingdoms are of this earth. Be our leader now," was their plea and His temptation.

It is quite probable, therefore, that Barabbas knew Jesus; and honestly wondered why He did not become a Zealot. In a recent epic poem Barabbas is pictured as the son of a couple who were steeped in the Zealot idea which they had chosen as "a cause" though their own need was not that great:

"How young I do not know [the poem begins] a little lad

When first I wondered why my mother wept  
Though bread and oil and wine we always had,  
And why my father's face was sternly sad  
With tired eyes as if he seldom slept."<sup>1</sup>

To be a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief is not the goal of life. Joy is a product of the perfect. But not joy based on ignorance of fact. And in a world which has the possibilities of the perfect, we do need that many shall have that sense which Barabbas felt "as if a mountain weighted every heart."

Jesus and Barabbas lived in a time—are you really conscious of it?—when oppression was sore upon the laden backs of men. We are in a mess now, to be sure, but not a greater one than then. Take the imagery of Jesus, His stories, His illustrations: Men idle all the day long in the market place because of widespread unemployment. Tax burdens which make ours as nothing. Graft in government. The loss of a coin so important that the whole house is ransacked to find it. Beggars, desperately sick on the streets with none to care. And, side by side, Dives and Lazarus. A man with so much that he had to build new barns to hold his stored-up grain while others

<sup>1</sup> From *Barabbas*, by Sara Bard Fields. Reprinted by permission of Albert and Charles Boni, Inc., New York City.



went hungry and had not where to lay their heads.

It is an old, old story and there is no simple gospel to solve it. Men's minds grow faint in trying to understand how the *idea* may pass from the purity of an abstract truth into the concrete action of men, without being so battered by the real world's passionate hates and fears that it loses its precision. An idea of the perfect which is to live in the world of men must be finely tempered in the white heat of truth and beaten out on the anvil of conviction. It is not enough to care that things are wrong. We must know in which direction the right leads and how to get there.

This does not mean, however, that we can make this a constant brake for men's terrific needs. We cannot be forever saying, "Just wait with patience until we work it out." When we cannot make the way clear for men, we must not blame the Barabbases of the world that they are impatient for results.

It is right for the poet to judge the revolutionist with the words:

"Impatient of the world's fixed way  
He ne'er could suffer God's delay,  
But all the future in a day  
Would build sublime. And the whole world  
In ruins lay.—An empty shrine."

But it is not enough to voice the ideal; *we must show* unto the world that "more excellent way" before we can rightly call the Zealots to a halt.

Barabbas couldn't wait. "You Galilean of this incorporeal state, you whose kingdom is not of this world, you whose temple is not made with hands, lead us, lead us through fire and blood, lead us with violence and the sword to tear down the false structure of our oppressors. A few sledge-hammer blows to strike off our chains and set us free—and then your Kingdom of love."

Is there any sane man who does not see the attractiveness of that appeal and the need of satisfying the realism behind it? And must we not recognize also that we are not really Christ's followers merely by doing what He did then? There are stages in the life of man and in the life of ideas. A child spends most of his time in a certain period of life in the attaining of a formal education. But when it goes on as the famous Columbia student who kept on going to school all his life—(Oh, yes, I know the financial motive behind it and he probably did many good things too—but the symbol stands)—then education becomes an absurdity.

Christianity becomes one too, if we make it so simple that we parrot the powerful truths of His teaching until they become platitudes. The time



comes for a man, as for an idea, when he or it must make good. We must answer the cry of Barabbas; in the spirit of Christ—yes; but we must answer it.

The contrast comes again in the imaginative poem. Barabbas is going to use the fact, that men profiteer in the Temple courts, as a means to gain his ends—the overthrow of existing authority. As the radical groups sometimes take on the defense of the racial cases of social injustice, and are said to care more (some people say “only”) for the dramatizing of their cause than the winning of the case, being willing to make the defendants unwilling and unwitting martyrs in order to emphasize an injustice rather than to get justice, so Barabbas planned with his fellow conspirators to gather in the Temple and there provoke an apparently spontaneous quarrel about a money-changer’s table over an alleged or actual injustice, and thus precipitate a riot which would give opportunity to seize the center of power. Before their plot worked out, however, Jesus drove the money-changers out.

“Look,” said Barabbas—“he has weakened the edge of our appeal. The money-changers will be back again. It is only a palliative.”

Believing he was doing right, Barabbas tried again at some other sore spot in the social order. A riot occurred in which someone was killed. He

was arrested and was to be tried for inciting to insurrection in which a murder occurred.

As Barabbas lay in jail he did not know what happened in the world. That Jesus was arrested he did not know, nor would he have greatly cared one way or the other. "A weak dreamer this Jesus." The jailer came to take him to Pilate's court. "My trial I presume—what do I care!"

And then he heard the shouts. "Not Jesus—Barabbas! Release unto us Barabbas."

"O God in heaven, they choose my cause! Not me, the cause they hail. The people choose not dreams but the rule of the people in their own strength." Thus the heart of Barabbas judged their cries.

He is released. On the edge of the crowd he follows the three to Golgotha. Not for Christ's sake; it was for these other two, his comrades in the cause, called thieves because they did not respect the property of the ruling class. They were to be crucified with Him whom they called the Christ.

As they went, Jesus faltered with a cross too heavy, and out of the crowd they pulled a black man to bear it. Barabbas shrank back in the crowd lest they put it on *him*.

Then one of his Zealot comrades faltered too. Barabbas sprang forward to help him and so walked the road to Calvary bearing the other



cross. Thus it happened that he was there and watched Him die.

Then for the first time Barabbas began to doubt his way. There is much still to be said for it. No sane man but sees *that* in the midst of time. Mussolini or Lenin contrasts sharply in his way with Kagawa and Gandhi. That the Barabbases of every generation do get results that are good in their kind no one can doubt. But Martha says it to him finally—says out loud the doubt in his heart. "Why did the crowd cry 'Barabbas'? Because of your cause, you think. No, Barabbas, don't you see? The leaders controlled the crowd. And the voice of the mob was but their megaphone. Do you not realize that if your way were greater menace to their privilege and power, they would not have cried for your release? Your way of hate, your way of force, of revolt they understand and can with their might control. But this man is conquering them with his words, his ideas, his ideals. You they understand and do not fear. But Jesus they do not understand, and they chose to release you because you are the weaker of two forces."

Do not misunderstand this contrast. The Christian way of life has often been a pale and flabby thing. An opiate indeed. A soft and placid sentimentalism. This is not the contrast. The contrast is between the way of Barabbas, the

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bitter partisan of a cause; and the way of Christ, so big, so calm, so poised that it needs not to lose the ideal in fighting for an idea, moving steadily, irresistibly, through Gethsemane and Calvary if need be, but primarily to the City of God.



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## CHAPTER 5

### THE DISCIPLE WHO MIGHT HAVE BEEN

I AM digging for a shade of meaning which is clear enough in my own feeling but is not the easiest thing in the world to express even to myself, because words so often freeze things into a form which resembles but which is not the truth one knows.

We come upon another part of our central idea, as we try to understand why these on the edge of the crowd never quite developed their potential relationship with Jesus, by looking at Lazarus. I have always thought of him as one of the close friends of Jesus. He was the brother of Mary and Martha; recipient of the astounding boon of return unto *life*, explain the miracle how you will. In his home Jesus had often found repose, a place of quiet and escape from the multitude, a place of peace of the moment that He might know better how to reveal the peace of God to men. Lazarus had rare opportunity to see the heart of Jesus and could naturally have been one of the inner group. But he never be-

came one. That startled me as I realized it the other day. He never became one.

Now, of course, with no accurate information, imagination can run wild. We have no comparative records by which we can deduce the truth as we did with Barabbas. Contemporary life gives us no clue. With both Barabbas and Nicodemus we can reconstruct the scene even as a scientist can tell you the approximate weight of a dinosaur from a fragment of his skeleton. With Lazarus we are moving in the realm of pure conjecture because the relationship is so peculiarly personal.

And yet just for that reason, that the relationship is not a part of his time but of all time, we can perhaps move without too blind a guidance.

Do you suppose Lazarus was lost to the central group because he was too personal in his friendship for Jesus?

God forbid that I should add an iota of feeling to the sense of the impersonal with which modern man views his world. The struggle of man as an individual, the difficulty of our social groupings, is to keep in the world the belief that the universe is personal. Most of us can believe that there is an Intelligence working in the universe; or at least that somehow there is a plan behind it, that it is not blind chance. We can believe in progress toward the cosmos; that the race will move out of chaos. But that a man as an indi-



vidual or that I, as a man, count? Well, that is not an easy faith to hold, much less to prove. If, therefore, you get an impression of greater impersonality in the meaning of life by this emphasis we make, I shall be sorry. It is not a necessary conclusion from following this lead, and in spite of the danger of misunderstanding we go on to follow it.

There is a quality in friendship which is soft. Is it not the realization of this which caused Jesus so many times to protest against the sentimentalism of human relationships? "Good Master," says the rich young ruler; says the lawyer, "Good Master!" "Why callest thou me *good*?" Jesus breaks out. "Why callest thou me Lord, Lord?" He says again. It's so easy to *call* Him Master.

Again they come and say, "Your mother and brothers and sisters are without asking for Thee." "Who are my mother, my brothers and sisters?" He replies. It is not by the right of soft and sickly sentiment but by the fact of right itself that we ought to deal with our fellow men and their needs.

"She begins to cry, and then what can I do?" distraught husbands, brothers, sons say to me. "She pulls out the stop, 'I'm your old mother,' " a young man said to me recently. "It isn't fair. I want to decide what is right. It isn't fair for her to bully me with tears."

It is like quicksand, this unresistant sentiment. It is like an octopus—you release two of the clutching strings that bind you with the only two hands you have but find yourself still firmly enmeshed in the other six.

Thus perhaps Lazarus failed Jesus.

One of the marking characteristics of Jesus was that He did not impose His personality, His convictions upon His friends. Influence them, yes, how can a man help but do that? Personality is not, by its very nature, susceptible of reduction to zero. Convictions are in their essence forces which cannot help but influence thought and action. But He did not attempt to impose, to overbear. Freedom is the word we want. Man must be free to choose.

It would be ridiculous to think that freedom means a blank mind, a vacuum of feeling, and emptiness of experience. You are not free to choose unless you know what the choices are, and what they mean, where they lead, what will happen when you follow out your choice. It is only in a purist sense—out on the infinities of philosophic thinking, or in the opposite extreme in an unthinking dogmatism—that Nietzsche is right in saying that “convictions are prison cells for the mind.” Convictions can be dwelling places for the spirit and as such not limit freedom in a practical and vital sense of the word.



Of course Jesus influenced men by His personality and His ideas. He gave the rich young ruler a choice by showing him His own conviction about the use and misuse of wealth. But He did not impose His own choice.

Thus it was that Lazarus, if he was to be a member of the inner circle, must choose to come, or at least, chosen to be one of the disciples, is free to accept or reject the choice. And that choice to go or stay always remains. Even though one of the Twelve, he, as any man, must be free—free as Judas to betray Him, free as Thomas to doubt Him, free as Peter to deny Him; free as were they all to desert Him.

We miss an essential quality in Jesus' faith in man if we do not see that He had no mental reservations in His mind or hidden compulsions in His ways with men. "I have set before thee this day death and life, evil and good, wherefore choose life." The choice is there, inevitable, as starkly revealed as was the rich young ruler revealed unto himself. But the chooser is man. Not God, man. Jesus was a good revealer of a God who made a choice when He made man free.

This is one of theology's great controversies and deservedly basic in our thinking. It is one of the true fundamentals. You cannot have it both ways. You can believe in man's choice of the good or you can be afraid for man. I am not

talking about whether man in his finiteness is limited in this world we know. I'm talking now about the nature of truth. It sounds so—what an awful word!—so anthropomorphic. It sounds so — six-foot-man-with-a-long-gray-beard-ish. No, that isn't much better. We must somehow see beyond the form to a truth. It makes God out to be too much like us, which is tragic because we are so little. Nevertheless, there is no other way to say this: I'm betting my life, that God is staking the universe on man as a moral being. Making man a free moral agent—giving man unlimited opportunity to choose the evil, the low if he wants to—God believes that man *will* choose the right, the true, in the end. Not must—*will* choose.

We must not spend all our time on theology, but this choice of point of view is basic. What we are saying is that Jesus truly reveals God in not compelling discipleship.

Yet why did Lazarus with such a choice before him become lost? Why did he go astray? We are suggesting that his feeling that he was a friend of Jesus blinded him to the truth Jesus revealed. Even as it does with us. The Church has ever had to be sensitive to one of its inevitable dangers. We do not realize how false to His message is our sentimental centering of our thought on what we call the person of Jesus.



There is a jealousy about our attitude somewhat similar to that of the original disciples when they asked Him to forbid others to heal except in Jesus' name. We do not see how little we make Him if we have to copyright Him, or at least issue His message with "patent applied for" written on it; nor how much more adequate He is for the need of humanity, if we do not make our loyalty to Him cheaply personal. Poor Lazarus, so overcome by the association with "my friend, Jesus," that he forgot to be a friend, he may well have been like many men today so concerned for the primacy of Jesus in the Church's thinking that bitterness creeps in when anything or anyone suggests that the truth of Christianity is more than His person.

Take an example of this attitude: One of my favorite definitions of the Church is "The gathering together of people around an idea." That this idea was incarnate in Christ; that we find our faith in it as truth given substance by His life; that our hope in its fulfillment in men is grounded upon the fact that He revealed it in time, we thankfully assert. And it is for many of us more thrillingly beautiful for our inspiration and more compelling of our loyalty to see the idea He tried to make us see than it is to be asked to follow Him in an often mawkishly sentimental appeal of a purely personal loyalty. Yet you would

be surprised at the number of people who consider such a statement disloyal to the Christian message. They say you are not making Christ "central" when you say that He did not create but He revealed the truth that love is more powerful than hate.

I am wondering if we rightly understand the oft-quoted statement that religion is the opiate of the people. Proverbially that is supposed to mean that with promises of future bliss the Church has made the masses unjustly contented with their lot. Is not there far greater danger that religion may make us miss the Kingdom because we have drugged ourselves into the lotus dream of a sentimental relationship, through Jesus, with God the indulgent Father of His favored children? Are we not carrying over into the realm of religion in its purity, the feeling, which we cannot escape in the world of men today, that we get our places in the world by personal influence and favoritism? Lazarus was lost to the inner fellowship because he never realized he was not of it. He stopped with a personal friendship for Jesus and never saw what being a friend of Jesus really meant.

I say "never." That is true only as a common expression in time. He never did so far as the record goes in Jesus' own time. But that he could and did is a part of our belief in the nature



of man. Don Marquis, in *The Dark Hour*, gives us the artist's understanding of the developing spirit when he has Lazarus meeting a frightened and tearful group of the disciples outside the city wall. "Have you heard?" they cried to him. "Oh, Lazarus, they are going to crucify Him. They have condemned Him to death." Then a great truth dawned on Lazarus and quietly he said, "What is death to Him?" It was an assertion of a truth realized, not the asking of a question.

Eugene O'Neill, in that play which reveals a side of his thinking seldom seen and little realized, has developed the theme of Lazarus' effect upon people after he had gone beyond the personal to that which fulfills the personal.

He showed men that there was no death to fear; that life afraid is death. As Robinson says it in the dramatic dialogue of Nicodemus, adapting the conclusion just a bit, "They are the dead who are afraid to live."

Lazarus brings us out to that conclusion as he says, "Man's loneliness is but his fear of life."<sup>1</sup> Well, we know that. Life is fearful sometimes. Its pressures are great. But that life in fear of life is death, we also know.

We do not blame men for this fear. We blame ourselves that so much of mankind has been so

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<sup>1</sup> *Lazarus Laughed*, by Eugene O'Neill. Reprinted by courtesy of Random House, Inc., New York.

blinded by the pettily personal that we have failed to help the world to see the meaning of His joyous abundant fearlessness of life.

These lines of Lazarus in the play drive it home to us. "That is your tragedy! You forget! You forget the God in you! You wish to forget! Remembrance would imply the high duty of living as a son of God—generously!—with love—with pride—with laughter. This is too glorious a victory for you, too terrible a loneliness. Easier to forget. To live by denying life."<sup>2</sup>

Lazarus himself almost forgot in O'Neill's play when his wife was in danger. We all of us forget so often when the softly personal touches us. The limits of our faith are stopped with the entrenchments by which we defend our personal interest. The life of Lazarus warns us of our own possible tragedy. To be in possibility the instrument of the eternal in this our time and to lose our opportunity because we have made religion too pettily personal in its expression, is to be but one more of those who missed the main chance as we stroll too easily on the edge of the crowd.

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*



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## CHAPTER 6

### THE WAY OF THE MATERIALIST

THE world has grown cynical about Jesus. It tries to make Him complex—to read between the lines of His sayings—to search out the ulterior motives of His doings. He spoke to men of simple things in common ways. He did what was natural and immediate in the light of timeless truth. But men suspected His purpose—guessed for His meaning.

They make Him an actor, a player of parts, a striver after effects. In nothing is it quite so evident as in the modern interpretation of His relationship with Judas. Poets and playwrights, novelists and essayists have drawn the lines of a new portrait of Judas.

To this we do not object. The traditional attitude toward Judas has been locked away on imperishable forms by Dante in his *Inferno*. There in the innermost ring of the deepest circle of hell, we find the place of eternal cold where “the emperor of the woeful realm,” his head and shoulders only issuing from the ice, was chewing with his three mouths the world’s greatest trai-

tors; and in the center mouth hung Judas, the vilest of them all. This is the conventional portrait of Judas.

That this picture is overdrawn we grant, but it is a far cry to the common interpretation today that "Dear Judas" (Robinson Jeffers's title) was the "Friend of Jesus" (Bates's title) who, because he loved Jesus most of them (Countee Cullen's interpretative poem about it), betrayed his Master at Jesus' command and with His desire.

The picture of Jesus assigning each man his place in the plan and to Judas the part of betrayal, in order that He, Jesus, might come to a dramatic ending and thus draw all men to Himself, whatever it does to Judas, makes Jesus out an insincere planner of drama.

Like a pretty girl with a plain friend, deliberately chosen; like clever Holmes with his dull-witted Watson for contrast; so Jesus needed Judas, these say, for His purpose; needed the betrayal for drama, the materialist for contrast. Plotted and planned was the betrayal to every fine detail. It is a cynical judgment of man, of his motives and genius, of Judas and Jesus, of God and His meaning, to make Jesus and Judas the close friends who plot for His glory. Things happen sometimes which make contrast—inevitable contrast. The dull of understanding often help those with vision by their sincere opposition.



Like a shadow to objects, they make light and its source visible. But to plan for effects is to blaspheme the Holy.

Moreover, I question also the judgment that Judas betrayed Jesus to save Him from Himself, believing that the scare of arrest and trial, punishment and warning would bring Him to His senses. Bates, in his *Friend of Jesus*, and Norwood, in his *Man of Kerioth*, suggest this.

The more natural explanation of it all seems to be that fundamentally Judas, the materialist, misunderstood Jesus, and the betrayal of the kiss of his lips was the natural period at the end of a sentence his life long had been saying. Let us take that idea up at least and see where it leads us.

It troubled all the disciples, no doubt, but it seemed to trouble Judas particularly that Jesus was so indifferent to His opportunities. He would not have been His disciple in the first place if he had not been caught by His radiance, if he had not loved Him and His vision. We so often forget that.

In that beautiful play of Norwood, *The Man of Kerioth*,<sup>1</sup> we hear Judas speaking of Jesus as "the world's man who walks at ease with God." We hear him try to explain to Mary why he must leave her to follow Him.

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<sup>1</sup> Reprinted by permission of Mrs. Robert Norwood. Doubleday, Doran & Company, Inc., publishers.

"A king he is,  
Throned on the highest thought where he beholds  
The future in the waking dream of God.  
Look on his face, and you will see a man  
Above all other men, so far beyond  
The love of self, it seems the infinite  
Shines through his eyes and overflows with words  
Upon his tongue."

We do not rightly interpret Judas if we forget the fact that among the multitudes who came and went he stayed and held the promise in his early days of one of the faithful.

It was time that got him at the end, as it gets all materialists. He was starved for results. "Hope was weak and sick with long delay." He wanted a sign, something accomplished, something materialized out of the ideal. He believed with his heart but he wanted to have proofs, proofs he could handle, proofs that would stand in the world. Again let the poet dramatist interpret it. The disciples are talking together about Jesus and His way. His strange way, so different from men's way.

JUDAS (*With passionate pleading lifts his hands to Jesus*):

Jesus, son of Joseph,

Make me believe as you have made me love!

JESUS: Judas! To love is to believe.

JUDAS: Oh, Master!

JESUS: What must Messiah do?





JESUS:                   Men are all the Sons of God,  
And God is love, and only love can speak  
With love.

JUDAS: Love will not save the world from Roman hate,  
And we must groan beneath Tiberius  
Until Messiah come with miracles.

*(He goes out in passion from the room. The eyes of all are turned on Jesus, who stands with outward-looking eyes as though upon the world.)*

It is time that makes cowards of us all. Our longing for the assurance of Time. Not knowing Time is what breaks us. The reaching of an end is our need, an end seen at least.

“My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning,” says the psalmist. They that watch for the morning know it cometh. It may seem long, but they know it depends upon the unhasting, never-resting ticks of time.

We can stand pain an hour or two longer until the doctor comes; poverty a few more years until our ship comes in; we can stand being good a little while until heaven comes, until an eternity of ease breaks upon us to pay for our grudgingly given unselfishness here.

You remember the naïve simplicity of the story of Joseph in Egypt. The answer could have been given by a child. Seven good years, seven bad. Fourteen years to live. Live partly as well as you might for the seven good years,



and you will have enough to live just as well during the bad ones. Q. E. D.

How simple Job's life could have been if he had known the years of his suffering and the assurance of his recovery to health and wealth! There would have been no cries of despair. "How long wilt thou forget me, O Lord? forever? how long wilt thou hide thy face from me?" as the psalmist cries.

Here is a man going up Mount Washington. It is late in the season; the first snow comes. He plods on. Faster and thicker it falls. He disappears from the knowledge of men. When the snow melted that spring they found his body only a hundred steps from the tiptop house.

Anyone can take a hundred steps no matter how exhausted. Yes, if he knows it is to be a hundred. That is where life beats us. It is significant that the people in Dante's Purgatory are all happy. They have a set task, a certain amount of evil to be paid for; a certain amount of dross to be consumed.

Here is a man about to be blinded. He is quite cheerful. "My eyes," said he, "will be taken from me here; but only for a short time, for small is the offense committed through their being turned with envy."

Let the fires burn hot then, the sooner will they be purged and go to heaven. Hell comes

only when men can see no way out, no ending to the eternal silence. Do our lives count for anything? Will we ever know? Silence—Then life becomes calisthenics.

This is where Judas began leaving Jesus. He was such a waster—Jesus was—Judas thought. He wasted time and energy on people who did not count: outcasts, and women, and common people. He wasted opportunities to capitalize the interest of the rich and powerful. He did not seem to realize that He lived in a world of men and their judgments and values. "The eternal Kingdom was all right, but it did begin here and now, didn't it? Of course it does! And where was it? Give us a sign. Show them thy power." So his mind thrashed over the moments. So he longed for some clear action.

He began to doubt the end. His eyes turned back to his early hopes and they were unfilled yet. Like the sailors on Columbus' ships who felt themselves to be sliding off the edge of the world, they wanted a sign. A branch with green leaves on it—a broken branch was enough. Anything. But a sign, they must have it. So Judas, the materialist, lost heart in the mists of the Kingdom.

The most beautiful modern stained-glass window I know shows the Holy City, the goal of men's dreams, firmly built on sure foundations.



Its gates always open: no sorrow, no night; always open, always light. "They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea."

There in the center of the window top is the gate of the City, clear, definite, open to all who reach it. The paths to it are distinct, there at the upper end.

Then the fir trees at the bottom of the window stand real as a snapshot; on hills of earth they stand, and you feel that you know them. Here are solid ground and familiar things. There are paths in the hills too.

But in between are mists and marshes; and the trail is lost somewhere. Above and below you see it, but not in the middle. The way to the Holy City leads through the indefinite, the unknown, the impractical. In the mists Judas kissed his Master. In the mists we all do betray Him.

We come then to the ending of Judas's life—not Aceldama, where he hanged himself. That was not the ending. The ending is here with the alabaster box of precious ointment.

It broke Judas as it was broken. Broke him in symbolism as it was broken in reality. The precious box of alabaster itself was broken never to have anything else in it. All was given, nothing asked.

Then the long pent-up rejection of the way of Jesus poured forth in Judas. As the ointment poured on His feet, on His head, comes the anger of Judas: "To what purpose is this waste?" "And from that time," the account tells us, "he sought opportunity to betray him."

But he betrayed himself and his highest dream, as materialists always do. We are accused by the world of impatient men of being impractical. And we are in one sense. It is a power, this vision of the Holy City, which needs careful handling. It can become an escape from the earth. We must not let it.

The materialist is right. The Kingdom begins here and now. If our experience of it is true, life will see its effect. Not in one year or two, not in five years or ten, is a testing of truth. But in the next moment, the next opportunity, in this generation, in this place, the Kingdom must come.

Judas was wrong in his measuring instruments, but right in his longings. He did misunderstand, but he *was* a disciple. We, who profess our discipleship, can learn from him, if we do not simply berate him. There *is* waste in our efforts, in our time and our energy. "We must ponder the path of our feet and let all our ways be established" in Christ, lest we also betray Him.



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## CHAPTER 7

### A MAN WHO WAS TOO WISE

MEN are afraid to know.

"A little learning is a dangerous thing," is an old proverb, and "Much learning hath made him mad," a saying. Said General Kropotkin of the Russian army when the Y.M.C.A. wanted to start classes for the soldiers in the rest camps: "No, they are soldiers. I do not want them to think. They are here to fight." Man's experience with wisdom is such that, as a hurt child dreads the fire, so he fears the flame of knowledge, and because he does not dare come near the fire of truth life is so often half baked or eaten raw.

Before we show how Gamaliel is another incarnation of our own moods as we view life from the edge of the crowd, we want to think a bit about man's distrust of wisdom, or perhaps, more fundamentally, his distrust of man's ability to handle wisdom.

It must be admitted that it takes a big man—a well-rounded and broadly based man—to gain knowledge of life without losing the zest for life.

The result of analysis of life is often death. "The more I know about God"—numberless people have said to me—"the less I feel Him to be real." "I no longer question the fact of God," a college boy writes me. "My scientific studies, particularly biology and geology, make God necessary to explain the world. But in finding a belief in God I have lost Him for myself." It is in our modern world of knowledge increasingly impossible to refuse to believe that there is an ordering Intelligence behind this universe and increasingly difficult to believe that that Being can care for individual man.

One of the most poignantly beautiful letters of longing despair came a year or so ago from a college girl who writes: "I do not doubt God's existence. If astronomy had not made me believe He must be, music would convince me. But as one looks up at the stars and realizes that the light from the nearest of them left it four years ago and that the farthest of them are millions of light years away, how can one possibly believe that the intelligence behind them has a place in it all for me? And yet—" and then she draws a line to express her inability to express in prose her longing wonder and goes off into that interpretation of man's inability to understand the nature of the world which John Hall Wheelock gives in his "Loneliness Without End":



"Between the immensities of heaven and earth  
My spirit's thought makes forward falteringly.  
In the vast reaches of His meditation,  
The sorrowful distances, my stricken wings  
Flag, failing me. My heart's imagination  
Faints in the lonely endlessness of things."<sup>1</sup>

As the result of proof of God oftentimes means loss of connection with Him, similarly the answer of experience is often disillusionment. "The more I learn about man, the less I have pride in manhood," is the way some put it, quoting the old saying, "God may be good, but man has made men doubt it." *Dangerous Corner*, by Noel Coward, gives dramatic expression to this feeling so many have that everyone has something to conceal. No one is fundamentally decent. Life had better not be investigated too deeply or there will be not enough people left outside jail to keep in it those that belong there. "Hast thou seen," said an ancient Jewish prophet as he causes you to dig down low to the secret passages within the foundation of the Holy City, "hast thou seen what the ancients of the house of Israel do in the dark, every man in the chambers of his imagery? for they say, The Lord seeth us not." And he points to the walls full of loathsomeness and all uncleanness. These things are not my belief. Mistake me not on that. But it is a common dread that

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<sup>1</sup> Reprinted by permission of Charles Scribner's Sons.

life is such that if you want to keep very much faith in decency, and goodness, and virtue, and things of good report, better not know too much about people and things.

We would be stupid to deny the validity of this experience. This is a segment of truth, as we well know. Many an unguarded faith has been shattered by a college education. Many a reputation has been shown to be skin deep when light was thrown upon the dark places where character had been expressing itself unseen. When there is no morality and no truth, knowledge is destructive.

Furthermore—and here we begin to approach Gamaliel—there is this danger in wisdom: Man's mind is finite. His capacity for understanding is limited. It is no wonder that as a defense reaction to the immensity of even the little truth he knows he should fall back on a position inevitable in some things, and at least comfortable as he says, "Nobody knows." Agnosticism is its technical label which some people, out of ignorance, rank with anarchy, atheism and antichrist, to stick just to the first letter of the alphabet. The fully informed mind is often a cautious mind—a mind afraid of enthusiasms and unwilling to risk integrity upon a possible false trail. Especially is this true among the jobbers and the retailers of ideas. The big man—the man of truly scientific mind—is not afraid to risk everything for the



truth. It is the little man—the retailer in both science and religion—who is so concerned with keeping his customers that he dares not risk his security on his visions or his ideals. He is—do you remember the expression in Nicodemus on that?—(He is) as “wary of Messiahs” as is a priest concerned with the safety of his church institution.

In this background I believe we can place Gamaliel. It is no place at variance with commonly accepted ideas as was our treatment of Barabbas and Lazarus. It is even more conventional, this portrait of Gamaliel, than was that of Nicodemus, because here the lines are drawn with greater clarity in the record.

He was a Pharisee, which denoted his religious temper. He was by profession a teacher, as many of the leading Pharisees were, and by right and choice a member of the Sanhedrin. He was liberal in ideas, open minded—in his profession was even thought a little radical because he studied the Greek, when to study the Greek was modern, not classical.

I have always thought that Emerson’s rule, never to read a book until it was three years old, could easily become a lazy philosophy of life. There is a deal of sense to it of course. Wasn’t it his statement also that “when I hear people talking about a new book, I go and read an old

one"? Much to be said for it—much. But someone has to read Greek when it is modern. Someone must translate the Bible into the vernacular, that we may some day have the King James Version. Someone has to live with an idea when it is new and to recognize it as true when it is first seen as well as when it becomes a platitude of truth. There is a curious attitude in man's common life that if you will only let an idea lie around on the parlor table for a while, you may after a time begin to get used to it and it won't hurt you. In a recent biography a man is telling about how he was an easy mark for booksellers and his wife didn't like it. He would therefore have the books sent to the office and when they had been there several months he would take them home one by one and to his suspicious wife would say: "Oh, no! I haven't been spending any money on books lately. These are just some that were lying around the office." Most of you know from personal experience how more than one idea has become a conviction for you by that easy method.

It is not the way the creative mind takes. One does not have to be rattle-brained—unless, of course, it comes naturally to one—in having an inquisitive rather than cautious mind, a daring rather than a careful attitude. But Gamaliel, who had started out as a liberal, perhaps even a



bit of a radical, had become timid because he knew so much, and not enough.

Gamaliel had seen many new messiahs—heard many new voices, read in his books of many movements and men of promise whose voices had become still, whose ways had ended in blind alleys. He had doubtless been fooled in his youth with visions which were mirages. He had learned to parrot the sage words of the elders: about God not being in a hurry, and Rome not being built in a day. He was lost in his wisdom.

He uttered his famous caution, the obstacle to so many causes, the escape of so many timid wise men. "If this . . . be of men, it will come to nought: but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it."

Let's be sure we understand the setting. It is after the crucifixion of Jesus. It is during the period of the Acts of the Apostles. It is in a time when many still living had seen with their eyes of flesh Jesus walking on the earth. Some people have claimed that Gamaliel, like Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathaea, and maybe more than either of them, had been a secret disciple of Jesus. This is generally discredited now, but it shows how close Gamaliel was in possibility to Jesus and his unquestioned familiarity with His life and time.

With this as background we find Gamaliel

faced with a situation. The enthusiasm of Peter has brought him into difficulties with the authorities, and they were about to take drastic action. It was then that Gamaliel, who dreaded violence, sought to be one of those smoothers-over-of-difficulties.

We are never going to get anywhere in life by smoothing over facts. What is the use of pretending matters of belief and matters of action are, after all, really the same? One of the things I like about the personality of Karl Barth is revealed in a statement made by a man who had a chance to talk with him. "I thought," he said, "before I went to see him that I disagreed with him, but imagined it was only a misunderstanding which would be cleared up when we had talked. I came away sure that we disagreed because he made the issues of difference clear." They did not separate enemies—they were friends, both seeking the truth and neither of them so shallow as to think that men with mutually exclusive fundamental ideas about God were really only saying the same thing in different ways.

Gamaliel, with his scholar's cautious tolerance and with his dread of violence, attempted to smooth things over by not having the men condemned but having them beaten first as a warning to be careful and then let go. Poor Gamaliel



—he was a radical in the minds of some because he insisted that poor heathens must be allowed the same rights as poor Jews in gathering gleanings after harvest. He was punctilious in saying "Peace be with thee," even to those outside of the household of faith, but he was afraid to make a mistake in an untried idea. "Watch it," he said. "Maybe it is truth. If it is, it will look badly on the record to have opposed it. If it isn't the truth, it will fail eventually anyway. Time will tell." *Time will tell!* You have seen him so often.

The wisdom of Gamaliel is the folly of the kingdom of God. It is so sensible—and so dead. It is inert with the dread inertia of the wisdom of authority. "I know," the Church has said, the historian has said, the professional scientist has said. "This is my field. The wisdom of the ages is laid out before me, and I tell you that what you are hoping is an idle dream: A ship made of steel or concrete instead of wood—absurd. A machine heavier than air to fly—ridiculous. A world without poverty—Utopia. Men to work without the motive of profit—contrary to nature. Man to be good unless you chaperon his weakness, the children of men to become children of God—my dear sir, don't make me laugh. These are ideals but they will not work—you'll see."

Yes, it did see, the world did, what happened

to the men involved in that incident. It saw Peter and John, "ignorant and unlearned men" the account tells us, who had discovered a truth about life: that it was only to be revealed to those who were not afraid of it.

Gamaliel was not a bad man, for a member of the Sanhedrin. (I wonder if we recognize our own Sanhedrins?) For a member of the Sanhedrin, he was above the average for courage. But he knew too much without knowing enough. He had learned to know life without discovering how to live. He is a part of our own moods as so often we are tempted to evade the decision of life's issues, waiting in complacent observation while life's values become for us only what might have been. He lived a long and learned life and was gathered to his fathers—and the place where he was hardly knew that he had passed by on the edge of the crowd.



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## CHAPTER 8

### A LAMP POST ON BROADWAY

ZACCHAEUS was up a tree. That statement is more than a fact. It is also a symbol. Life had gone stale for him. We arrive at this knowledge of his feelings not by implication but from the things he said and did, and, from the nature of men in similar circumstances, it is a fair judgment. He was a success—and success was dust and ashes in his hands. He was a power—and there was nothing to do but to make more power with it. He had money—more than he could use, and it was like a meal of sawdust in his teeth. He had position in the community but no place where he felt at ease. He was up a tree as far as life was concerned. That is probably why he was interested enough to try to see Jesus; and when he could not see Him, being short, he climbed a tree—an actual one this time. And when he came down from that tree, he came down from the other tree too. It is an interesting, and a difficult, and a revealing story—the story of Zacchaeus and the two trees as they stood on the edge of the crowd.

There is no special reason why we should place him back in a particular spot chronologically. He was not of Jesus' time on the calendar any more than Jesus Himself was of that time. There was an eternal quality about their contact. It was a meeting of two attitudes toward, and habits of, life. It was as natural as the meeting of two travelers at a crossroad. It was as logical as an actor answering his cue as he obeys the lines of the dramatist. It happened last year in—I'll make it broad—in Ohio, a few years ago in our own state. There are men with names in my mind's eye now. It is happening now and must happen to more people, and more frequently must happen if the kingdom of God is to come.

But while his is a universal type, he is seen best by details of his time. Look for him in yourself, and around you in your circle of acquaintance, as we tell what we know about him.

He was a business man of Jericho, which was a good town for a live wire. You remember the business man going from Jerusalem to Jericho with eager anticipation of a quick turn in his money, who fell among thieves on the way. It was from that town that Zacchaeus came. Palm trees and their products were a possible source of his income, and almost without question he had his part in what was a common racket of those days—the system of taxgathering. Money had



come easily to him and he was considered a good business man in any common meaning of that word. He would have been as sincerely surprised as a banker investigated by the Senate, if anyone had questioned his integrity. Why, it was a system—everybody knew about it. That was the way things were done. How else could you do them?

Look here—let's be reasonable—it's like this: The government needs taxes to go on with, doesn't it? And, of course, it has to get them from those in power who have to have their rake-off. We aren't in business for our health. No, of course not. You couldn't expect that. And you had to expect that the collectors would get theirs. They have to live, don't they? Why, sure! There's nothing wrong about that. It's the way these things run. Of course taxes are high—but how could you do it otherwise? "You can't," that's the answer. After all, said these Tammany Hall-ites of that day, it's practical politics. It's just good, honest, legitimate graft.

It gave him a chance, too, to turn a pretty penny now and then on tip-offs: Foreclosures on palm groves and knowing where the new highway to Jerusalem was to be laid to avoid the robbers on the road. He was very indignant as he talked with friends on the street corners about those robbers. Something would have to be done

about this "crime wave." Did you hear about the assault the other day? The rabbi saw him on the side of the road but didn't stop, suspecting a trap. It was a Samaritan traveling man who brought him in. Can you see him? Zacchaeus. He was a good business man.

Then life turned sour. Do you remember in Lewis's *Babbitt* how that revulsion of feeling came to one of the realest fictional characters in a decade or more? What was the use! Why go on beating the other fellow to inside dope and by special pull getting a head start on a real-estate grab? Somehow the fun of it had gone out of the game. He was missing something. Life was passing by and he was standing still. He felt the creative longings of his idealistic days struggling for expression. If he only had something he really cared to do—a relationship which was not superficial, on the one hand, as most of his business acquaintanceships were; or complacently accepted on the other, as his family and friends were.

He was really glad of the smashing tragedy in the lives of two of these acquaintance-friends because it made him hope he might be of real use to someone.

He tried the church, but all he got there was absorption in it as an institution, not a fellowship from which to act creatively.



He tried to stand for an unpopular cause, but his stand was a personal escape rather than a conviction of a need, and naturally he had no stamina under pressure with such a weak foundation.

He was very real, and very tragic, was Zacchaeus. Did you think I was talking about Babbitt? The dividing line between them is not clear—cannot be clear since in this novel of life they are one.

If some of these thoughts were not in the mind of Zacchaeus, how otherwise could a staid business man, a solid business man, do as undignified a thing as Zacchaeus did? He found he could not see Jesus from the edge of the crowd; and suddenly he wanted to see Jesus tremendously. What was He like? He knew men who had been with Him and who were different. Somehow he wanted to be different too. He forgot himself. He ran ahead of the crowd along the way Jesus was to take and climbed a tree to be able to see.

It takes a big emotion to make men forget their dignity. Can you see one of our deacons getting so excited about someone passing on Broadway that he would run ahead of the crowd and climb up on a lamppost to see what was going on? That shows you how profound was the emotion of Zacchaeus. Solid business men were not so much different then that they would do such a schoolboy stunt without reason.

The mind does funny things if we give it a chance. In trying to see Zacchaeus in our day, I wondered how certain of our church officials would look—how I myself would look—scrambling up on the braces of our bulletin board outside the church as some visitor to our city passed by. We must not take the Bible for granted, if we are to see its revealing situations as they really are.

This is the situation—a good business man—a substantial citizen—a part of a legitimate (put quotation marks around that) system—successful—influential—up a tree in more senses than one.

It is a queer solution. Why didn't Jesus say to him, "Sell all thou hast and give it to the poor and come and follow me"?

If there is any question about the fact that Jesus was giving a particular prescription to a sick soul, not a panacea formula for the cure of the world's ills, when He gave His famous answer to the rich young ruler about how he—the rich young ruler—could attain eternal life, the contrast in His action with Zacchaeus would be conclusive. The rich young ruler was a prisoner of his money. He had the sickness of the system. Zacchaeus was no prisoner of his money. Like many a man in the glory of the monastic period, his possessions had become a burden. They sat



upon him like an old man of the sea. (You remember in *Sinbad the Sailor*.)

Zacchaeus did not have the sickness of the system. He was sick of it. To that sick soul Jesus gave encouragement.

"Half my goods I give to satisfy the needs of the unfortunate. To everyone whom I knowingly have done what I now see to be an injustice, I shall restore fourfold." Zacchaeus told Jesus his plan for the future.

"Good," said Jesus, and knowing Him as we do we can safely add a qualification—good as a beginning. "This day salvation has come to this house."

Here again we can easily become lost in fanciful explanation. We do not know the end of the story. Maybe there grew in Jericho as a result of the changed life of Zacchaeus a fellowship which transformed the town. The fact that there is no record of it does not necessarily deny the occurrence. Yet we are probably not wrong in thinking that no such thing happened. There are two reasons in addition to the obvious weakness of a sudden and sentimental conversion which would make us think that; and both of them are dangers in our own religious development.

The first is the fixed limit on one's participation in needs outside oneself. There is no ques-

tion of the value as a starting point—if we are sure that it is a starting point—of a definite proportion of income set aside for one's own participation in the support of those agencies and efforts which create the New Earth. The advantage is obvious. In cold blood you have made a decision. This much of my income I can use for no other purpose than the fostering of some good cause. You will be astonished at first that the percentage of income you have been using is so small. Somehow you felt, giving haphazardly, that it was larger. You will discover, if that fixed percentage is at all adequate, that there is an unexpended sum which you can either devote to greater support of agencies you now give to or for participation in those causes which are new but in line with your sympathies. A definite percentage-accounting is a stimulating spiritual exercise.

Yet this, which is in its beginning a spiritual advance, becomes so often a rut of goodness. Tithers (those who give the Biblical one tenth of their income) often become self-righteous, proud of themselves.

"Look at me," said the Pharisee, "I obey the law—I give tithes of all that I possess."

Here is the first danger. No fixed percentage, no fixed amount can be an escape for man from the terrific demands of the Christian way of life—a way that varies in its experience for different



men and for the same man at different times. Two men are in my mind in contrast at the moment. One of them is also in contrast with himself. One began as a boy to give one hundred dollars a year to the church. It was a great spiritual achievement, a real sacrifice of his own ease and comfort as it came from the pocket of a factory boy. He died at over ninety years of age, leaving several millions of dollars, still giving one hundred dollars a year as his annual subscription to the church. The other is a man who with a salary of nearly fifty thousand dollars a year gave fifteen thousand dollars to many different charities and was proud of his munificence. His income has shrunk to thirteen thousand dollars now (less than what he used to give away). He is now giving over half of it away and is not proud. He intends, as he can make adjustments, to make his percentage greater.

The first danger of Zacchaeus would be a fixed habit of goodness.

The second danger was restitution. Quite obviously, if there were those to whom injustice had evidently been done and to whom restitution could be made clearly and effectively, that obligation did rest upon him. Yet do we not have to recognize it as a principle of creative living, that no man can put together the past? Life has a time-arrow in it, as Eddington points out. Or,

if you prefer it, Humpty-Dumpty sitting on the wall illustrates the truth. All the king's horses and all the king's men couldn't put Humpty-Dumpty together again.

Life is a pool into which man drops a stone. How hopeless, if, when an intentional or a careless stone falls, we are struck with remorse and try to chase the widening ripples and gather back the pool to stillness again. The farther you chase the ripples, the more impossible it is to do the task. Visualize yourself, even with tireless wings, trying to smooth out the increasing circles with careful hand.

Obviously, to be concerned with the erasure of the past is to stop a positive life at the moment it has impulse to begin. The way for every man, up a tree as Zacchaeus was in Jericho, disturbed as are we all at times by a sense of life's futility, desirous as are we all of making life count for more—the way for every man is ahead. So many of us are held on the edge of the crowd, impotent, because we are prisoners of a past. Our escape from that prison of past inadequacies begins, of course, in a strong and definite beginning in the present. But we must have our eyes on the indefinite increase of our future living of our ideals, lest we find ourselves left behind on the edge of the crowd.



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## CHAPTER 9

### HE WANTED TO BE GOOD

WILLIAM BLAKE has a poem in which he mentions Caiaphas, whom we are considering in the series of portraits of men on the edge of the crowd around Jesus. He says of him:

“Caiaphas was in his own mind  
A benefactor to mankind,  
And read the Bible day and night.”

You have him there. That shows his mind and how like him we are. He was a good man in his own estimation. He acted according to his lights, but he was color blind.

It is no fun to face that curious feeling which comes whenever we see ourselves as others see us. When you realize, for example, that Jesus would probably call us—well, at least some of us (yes, probably most of us)—“scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites,” because of our attitudes as good church members, it makes religion a strangely insecure proposition.

Did you ever catch yourself looking complacently at the story of the two men who went up

to the Temple to pray, the one a Pharisee and the other a publican? The Pharisee stood and prayed thus *with himself* (a lovely phrase): "Thank God, I am not as other men are—I keep the law—I give tithes of all I possess." "Poor swollen-headed fool," we say, brought up as we are on the tradition that the proper attitude of a Christian is to refuse to admit he is anything more than a worthless worm. "Look at that prideful hypocrite. Thank God, I am not as that Pharisee." It is a fact which honesty demands we face that the Pharisaic attitude toward religion and life is all too easy for us to fall into.

It is easy because any explanation of life, any way of action, is much simpler if it can be held in its entirety and without question by an authority superior and external. One can then give up the hunger to understand in the assurance that while this is beyond understanding, nevertheless it is completely unalterably true. This attitude toward religion and religion's control of life is not confined to any one church. You find it even in so-called liberal churches where the impulse to discover the waiting truth runs down in a timidity which emerges from the thought that perhaps, after all, we might lose everything we had in questioning established truth and still not gain anything sufficient to carry us on.

Religion seems to some people like an egg.



You can keep it quite awhile if you will surround it with proper temperatures, if you will preserve it in a mental water-glass. But don't let anyone chip or even crack it. Then it will "go bad" unless immediately used up.

Now, quite obviously we could carry the analogy on and say that the reality of the egg as an egg is gone when it is saved and not used. It is then no better than a china nest egg just because you do not use it. Its only value is to be used some time. Similarly, religion becomes an idol if kept like an egg. Its value is in being used up—ever used up—not kept as either a china or a Chinese egg. But, after all, we must never push analogies too far. They are meant to assist two minds groping to find each other in the mists of common words, and we must not slap too vigorously the eager fingers.

The point is that we must not forget that Caiaphas, the villain in the cast by popular acclaim, was not necessarily concerned only for himself—was not in that sense fundamentally selfish, and may have been sincerely concerned with the safety of the church as was Archdeacon Brandon in *The Cathedral*. To the outsider he was swollen with pride of self, loving the church for his own aggrandizement, using the church for his own advancement in privilege and power. Yet, like Brandon, in his heart of hearts there

was an honest belief that that attitude, which some people called arrogance and pride, was for the protection and the safety of the church he loved.

I am not suggesting a mawkish sentimentality about Caiaphas, which, like our attitude toward certain criminals, becomes at times an emotional orgy divorced from truth. But we must not make Caiaphas a scapegoat.

Dare I take it for granted that you know what a scapegoat is? We do not know our Bibles or our Greek mythology either as we should. The scapegoat in the Jewish ceremonial system was the animal upon whom, by rites of the priest, the sins of the whole nation for that year were placed. Having transferred the crimes to the goat, the priest, protected from infection by ceremonial purification, then led the animal out into the wilderness. There in the wilderness the goat was abandoned along with the people's sins, unable to return to civilization with the sins he bore. It is interesting to see how in primitive, and even advanced stages of man's development, this rite comes up in various forms. This is the scapegoat.

We must not make Caiaphas a scapegoat. He is to be considered as a man like unto ourselves with many good points and good intentions. He can be a warning to us, a mirror for us, in whom we can see ourselves in some of our moods.



Jesus scared him. Caiaphas was used to cranks of various kinds who, with their panaceas, would save the world so easily. Like patent medicine ads and their promises, alluringly easy were their roads to success.

What do you want: To speak French, play the piano, dominate business conferences, become the life of the party? Any or all of these things you can have overnight merely by listening to records on the Victrola, reading over ten easy lessons, swallowing this pill, or reading one book on personality.

It is true, isn't it, that the royal road to success, the messenger boy to president theme, is dangerous to man's developing spirit? No experienced observer of life but sees the dangers in the oversimplification of those who would bring in the kingdom of God riding on a hobby horse.

Caiaphas was so used to this phenomenon of life that he had lost his perspective. He pigeon-holed all people who differed from him as cranks, and when they became too big for his pigeon-holes, he was afraid and wanted to crush them.

He feared Jesus. The multitudes followed Him. What was that He had said about the Temple? That it made no difference, even if it were destroyed. That it could be destroyed—wiped out—eliminated from the social organization—but there was nothing to fear. In three

days the process of rebuilding a better, purified Tabernacle of the spirit would be evident.

The Temple not important, but man important? Yes, Jesus had said that; and something about man being the temple of God. Ridiculous! Absurd! Why, the man is mad! He is dangerous! He stirreth up the people! He endangers the influence of the only power which holds the people—the weak, wandering, pitifully blind people—to the ideal.

Can you see his mind operate? If you read as prelude to the consideration of Nicodemus the dramatic dialogue of that name by E. A. Robinson, you will recall that Caiaphas was naturally not the dominant interest in that reading. Caiaphas never is. He is a character part in all the scenes in which he appears. But I hope you did not miss the impression of that ecclesiastic, that high priest of the established order, as he went through his moods of amusement, exasperation, fear, and self-justification. Caiaphas may have been blind—we think he was; narrow—we think he was; afraid—we think he was. But he was not insincere. He was honest in his conviction.

We need to drive home to ourselves in these days of a world in flux, that text which makes a tremble in the mind. We often miss its terrifying significance in the Sermon on the Mount. "If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness,



how great is that darkness!" If that which you believe, truly and honestly believe, to be right is really wrong, what terrible results come upon the world from your blind conviction!

Let's illustrate it from big business—which is the Caiaphas of our modern world. Much opportunity comes to a man on such an assignment as mine to see the minds of business men at work on their ideals. This scene I now present, given without eliminating words which would take from its reality, is from a modern novel, but is true to the conversation you will hear at times in Pullman smoking rooms and at some business lunches. It happened to be at a directors' meeting considering the demands of labor. I quote the exact words as one of them speaks in exasperation. "The rights of the laboring man will be protected and cared for, not by labor agitators but by the Christian men to whom God has given the control of the property interests of the country. They're us—us who are sitting around this table. And I, as one of them, say to that whole God-damned crew of socialists, radicals, Y.M.C.A.'s, and meddlers in other people's business—Go straight to hell." After which beautiful Christian expression he sat back and chewed vigorously at a cigar.

I have heard just such an expression, not as condensed as that, but with all those ideas and

words and some more, expressed by men who were church officials. I was mad when I first heard things like that, even as I boiled over when I first read that quotation from the novel. I still deplore such language and much more such sentiments. But I missed and you will miss if we are not careful, even as we have missed in our thought about Caiaphas, an important fact.

These business men are not dishonest, not insincere, in such statements. They are speaking exactly as they see things, and are so unconsciously blind that it puts the aching wonder into our consciousness, will there never be light? If these men with opportunity, education, the advantage of culture, and the constant touch with the idealism of the Church are so incapable of seeing how obviously unchristian our attitudes are, what hope is there for man ever to see?

The point we want to drive home to ourselves is very simple. We do not wish by this apparently sympathetic look at Caiaphas to go off into that sickly sentimentalism which makes of sin only undeveloped good. Caiaphas was not a good man, or, at least, not a praiseworthy man. To be blind when sight is possible, to dwell in darkness when light is available is not to be condoned. Let fall upon him the stern condemnation which Jesus expressed in His conversation with Nicodemus. "He that believeth not is condemned



already. . . . And this is the condemnation, that . . . men loved darkness rather than the light, because their deeds were evil." And in that awful condemnation of the rejection of light as it falls on Caiaphas let us not forget how upon us that same condemnation may now be falling as we, like Caiaphas, hesitate in our own day on the edge of the crowd.

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## CHAPTER 10

### THE HOPELESS COG

**T**HAT a man acts differently from his own desires—uplifted sometimes, degraded sometimes by a mob spirit—is one of the obvious truths about society. It is the thesis of a powerfully written book by Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, that unfortunately society is less capable of achieving a moral ideal than is individual man. We can infer from his title and statement of thesis—although the words are mine, not his—that in the machine of society man tends to become a cog, moving, unwillingly sometimes but at least helplessly, over the innocent or unfortunate. Doubtless every one of you has been at some time an atom in a mob in whose power you have been unable to exert your own will. *Doubtless* is almost too weak a word for a city whose subway jams are notorious.

In a football crowd you have felt yourself—joyously if you were alive and strong, fearfully if you were weak or had weaker ones with you for protection—moving without volition, a chip upon the stream. (I say chip rather than drop



of water because still you do feel yourself not quite like everyone else. Strange, isn't it, how we feel that even in this multitude which takes away our power, we retain a feeling of our own individuality?) Well, there you are, a chip on a stream, different from it yet unable to be different from it, approaching a narrows which seems to slow up as if gathering itself for a great effort. If you have ever stood beside Niagara, you will remember the pressure of that final sweep which makes the water seem a solid piece. A chip on that stream eddies for a moment in a corner, is caught into the full force of the stream, tumbles at last, tossed and turned, until it is held in the pipelike pressure of the final rush. Niagara takes your breath away in that feeling of relentless, inevitable power. Thus you, in the football crowd, go through the narrow gate until the mass spreads out on the other side, breathless, relievedly laughing at being through. "Whew!" we say, "That was fun!" or "Never again for me—that's too dangerous."

You do not need a panic to be frightened in a crowd. At the annual meeting of a great church federation many people were caught one day in a crush at the coatroom windows. Now, it is not my desire to trample little old ladies under my feet; there is not the slightest eagerness in me to jam myself against them so that they cannot

breathe. But I could save myself from crushing the one in front only by bracing myself against another one in back. There was no place to plant my feet; no wall to form support to make a safety zone for a weaker one. I found myself at last literally tossed out of that stream of humanity at almost the opposite exit from the one I had planned to use. To have added fear or panic to such a crowd would have made a scene worthy of Doré in his most vivid mood.

Suppose in such a crowd you crushed the life out of a little old lady. Would you blame yourself? Assuredly not. You would willingly have given up your life for her, but you had no opportunity. To have killed yourself would obviously not have saved her. There would then have been only two dead bodies instead of one, one crushed by the mob, one self-slain. "It was the multitude that killed her. What could I do?" you would say.

That is what Pilate did say in effect. "I'm a helpless cog." "What hope is there for me to prevail against the mob?" "What can I do?"

There are, of course, certain differences between the physical mob and the pressure of mind on mind. We are inclined to say, and with considerable reason, that the attitudes of man have approaches to infinities in strength which make man capable of far greater power of resist-



ance to outside pressure than would be true in the greater limitations of bodily strength. Yet we must not neglect to see that for the ordinary run of human beings the mob's pressure of mind is sometimes even more powerful over the individual than the pressure of body. We do not rightly understand the recent, to us apparently impossible, jury verdict in the Scottsboro trial unless we take into account this terrific pressure of the mob mind. It is a mistake to liken the Negroes' trial to the crucifixion of Christ, as I have heard some do. There is an incongruity in such a comparison. But it is fair to compare the jury with Pilate, although Pilate was probably of weaker stuff even at that.

Pilate was a politician in the meaner sense of the word. Advancement depended upon his record and Pilate was ambitious. He apparently was (in a somewhat passive way) personally desirous of freeing Jesus. It was not only because he wanted to get rid of a decision, but also because he was really somewhat moved by the attitude of Jesus under trial. Pilate had seen many men in danger from the religious bigotry of the time. This was not the first case that had come before him. Yet here was someone different from the ordinary. He even caused Pilate to spend time and effort in talking with Him about what He knew.

Yet that feeling was, of course, overborne, as we all of us realize through many Lenten talks on this scene, by his realization that it was a "hot" issue—too hot an issue to handle squarely. It is even possible to conceive that Pilate might have been personally a righteous man as politicians go; but he was as little desirous of getting mixed up in this squabble within the religious elements of his province as was a governor of New York state to take hold of the investigation of the mayor of New York City (that seems a long time ago, doesn't it?) before a Presidential campaign. It was to Pilate an embarrassing issue. "Why couldn't these Jews keep their squabbles to themselves?" He was impatient with a set of circumstances which threw the decision up to him.

"Take him to Herod," he said, at first, "I haven't jurisdiction." "Decide it according to your own religious courts. Don't make it a political issue." "What! You want him crucified? Why, what evil hath he done? Let me scourge him as a warning and let him go. You are making too big a thing out of it." Pilate dodged and ducked.

Is there anything quite so characteristic as the attitude of Pilate to express our own frustration in the face of injustice, or our own avoidance of the implications of the Christian message in a social order where the buying of a shirt can be-



come for us a symbol of our helplessness to know when and how to protest against intolerable working conditions and wage scales for women and children; or where man has lost his power to judge the facts in a black-white world that symbolizes not only race but partisanship; or where nationalism beats the drums of division and lines up even the Church universal into a church of Hitler or of one-hundred-per-cent Americanism?

"What can I do?" the hopeless cog responds. "I am one man and cannot stand against the multitude. What good will it do? I only delay the inevitable. As well might the straw say to the wind, 'Be still'; the grain of sand to the tides, 'Recede,' as to expect the world of men to be affected by my wishes."

"I think you are wrong," said Pilate, "but what can I do? Take him and do your will. I wash my hands of it."

Let's divide this weak attitude of Pilate, so characteristic of our own evasions, into two particulars so that we may not be lost in too great generalities. The two particulars are so mixed up that we have no logic in saying first and finally. We arbitrarily take one of them first.

He said, it is not within my *power* to change the evident stream of desire. A politician was once asked what it meant to be a leader of the

people. "Find out what the people want," he said, "and then run a little faster than the rest crying, 'Come on, I'll show you the way.'" We have seen that type of leadership in the contemptuous beer parade in the days when to jump on the antiprohibition band wagon was the politicians' best bet. We see it permeating the Church in times of social stress, an attitude of expediency of which we are all guilty. "I am too weak." "I am only one." "What can one do among so many?"

We do not believe the daring assertion of Jeremiah that in one man convicted of a great idea, the salvation of the world begins. Hear again the words of that dramatic episode when young Baruch with his mob of nationalists of his day is faced by the lone figure of the great prophet. The fears Jerusalem had of the imperialistic ambitions of Babylon have driven the people to play the world's old game of power politics. They hope through a military alliance with Egypt to gain a collective security for themselves against the threat to their civilization. They are rushing toward the seat of government to demand preparedness for war.

Jeremiah stands protestingly in their way. The crowd mows him down and passes over him—all but Baruch, who is struck by the indomitable courage of the man.



As Jeremiah rises dazedly to his feet Baruch says, "I had believed you a weakling, and therefore did I oppose you as one who shunned action and favored the easy path of peace."

"The easy path of peace!" said Jeremiah, slowly. "Do you fancy that peace is not action, that peace is not the action of all actions? Day by day you must wrest it from the mouths of liars and from the hearts of men. You must stand alone against the multitude; for clamor is always on the side of the many. The meek must be strong."

Then Baruch realizes that Jeremiah is not going to quit and he says, "But you will not go alone?"

"I must go, I must go," Jeremiah replies, "I must make my word good. Empty is the speech of him who will not stand by it with his life."<sup>1</sup>

Jeremiah is living out the hope recorded in his prophecy. "Run ye to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, and see now, and know, and seek in the broad places thereof [I almost said, 'the Broadway thereof'], if ye can find a man, if there be any that executeth judgment, that seeketh the truth; and I will pardon it."

"Yes, but look what happened to him," say the Pilates of the world. And men remain hopeless

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<sup>1</sup> From *Jeremiah*, by Stefan Zweig. Copyright, 1929, by The Viking Press, Inc.

cogs in the juggernaut car because they are afraid to be rejected or crushed by the mob.

Now, mind you I am not blaming Pilate so much as blaming ourselves for being like him. There is a certain attitude of calmness in the face of inevitable failure which characterizes the truly great and greatly honest life.

It is not necessarily in one known to be great. Some of the greatest things man has done have been done by the unknown. At the time of the French Revolution there is the story of an occurrence at one of the barricades. The Revolution had proven abortive and the barricade was abandoned to its fate. Some twenty or thirty men were left for whom the next day was sure to bring extermination. "Why not steal away if possible in the night? Defeat is inevitable," said the voice of their fear articulate on the lips of one of them.

"Be it so," said the voice of an unknown. "Be it so. Let us raise the barricade and remain within it. Citizens, let us offer the protest of corpses. Let us show that if the people abandon the republicans, the republicans do not abandon the people."

"The name of the man who spoke thus was never known. He was some unknown hero, that great anonymous always mixed up in human crises and social geneses, who at the given moment utters the decisive word in a supreme fashion and



who fades away into darkness after having represented for a minute the people and God." What a line that is! "After having represented for a minute the people and God."

We have gone far away from Pilate. But we had to in presenting the positive side of power. Pilate had the power as we all have the power. It is what we dare to see and are willing to live which is the ultimate test of whether we choose to follow the way of Christ or of Pilate.

But again Pilate's attitudes show forth. Not only was he saying by word and attitude, "It is not within my power." He was also saying, "It is not within my *province*." The whole record shows his unwillingness to assume the responsibility, and in the final act of that dramatic incident he washes his hands of blame.

Some of you may remember that bit of spiritual insight in Masfield's play where this side of Pilate's fear is mentioned. The whole scene is worth reading for its beauty. I point out in paraphrase the special significance for our present consideration.

Procula, the wife of Pilate, awakens from a dream the night that Jesus was being tried and hurries to her husband, asking him not to harm this holy man. Pilate, husbandlike, wants to know what the dream said.

Well, Procula cannot tell him. It is an im-

pression of horror, a feeling that here was truth daring to stand against the world and being crushed by it.

Naturally, Pilate is not comfortable under this appeal and is a bit impatient with her, disclaiming any godlike ability to judge the worthiness of a man. His only job, he claims, is to determine whether the law is being observed, and he says very frankly that Jesus broke the law knowing what he was doing. It was not blind disobedience but open-eyed opposition to the rulers of the State and established religion.

Then, in haunting phrases, Procula admits that it was not blindness but the hunger and thirst of an illumined soul that caused Jesus so fearlessly to do what he did. As she speaks her lines there comes back to memory the Madman's song on Beauty which, because one is unafraid, one knows always in the confusion of the broad ways of the world.

We are not surprised, however, that Pilate is not able to answer Procula's plea. He falls back upon the technicalities. Therein lies one of our greatest questions. There *are* certain things outside the province of a church. It is customary to say that politics, for example, or other moot questions of social significance—economic, industrial, racial or international—are outside the Church's province. I wonder if we are making



our catalogue correctly. We admit that some things are outside the province of the Church. But what things? Partisanship is outside our province, and bitterness, and contempt of ignorance, and such things. But is injustice anywhere, or oppression, or twisted attitudes or acts of privileged groups without our province? "The first to see, the first to feel, the first to move against all forms of moral evil in the world," said the molder of the Broadway Tabernacle's spiritual heritage in those early days of the church's founding. Is it still, in these days of terrible need, man's glory? Wherever there is need, or injustice, or danger to the right, there we should be in His name. We should stand there because we are Christians trying to build His way. Take the results as they come, but let our witness be that a Christian is not a hopeless cog in a huge machine.

Oh, yes, we are far away from Pilate, we cannot seem to keep near him in our thoughts. May we be far away from him in our reaction to the mob mind of our own day as so often we find ourselves hesitating about acknowledging Him as we stand in the courtyard of Pilate without on the edge of the crowd.

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## CHAPTER II

### THE MAN WHO SAW HIMSELF

IT is about time that we pick out ourselves standing on the edge of the crowd. We have been thinking for all this time about the men around Jesus and have tried to see ourselves in them. We face now a scene in the life of Jesus where we need no other man to tell us how far off we are from following Him. Not in morbid introspection but in simple honesty we must know that we do doubt Him, have betrayed Him, will again desert Him. We are dishonest with ourselves if we fail to see that.

The startling thing is, however, that when we know that most poignantly, when we do feel ourselves most abased in a sense of "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips," it is because we have seen a contrast—a contrast between ourselves and God, or between ourselves and Christ, or between ourselves as we are and as we might be.

Isaiah had felt himself good when he was a subject of King Uzziah. His sense of unworthi-



ness came when he cried, "For mine eyes have seen God."

Job had felt righteous when he was in contrast with his friends. He is proud of his record of charity, and honor, and courage, and high public service. It was when he had seen God with his eyes rather than heard of Him with his ears, that he abhors himself in dust and ashes.

The rich young ruler had no doubts of his place at the head of the class. All that men had ever been asked to do, more than most men had managed to do, he had "done from his youth up." It was when Jesus turned his thoughts to the "exceeding righteousness" of God that he became "sorrowful."

Peter had felt strong—until Christ called him a rock. No one had ever caused him to question his standing as a good fisherman. He knew himself to be weak when he faced the job of being a fisher of men. The depths of man's need—"Master, why could not we cast out that devil?"—the pressure of Pilate's court from which the proud boaster of discipleship went out to weep bitterly, these made him know his weakness.

This contrast of "I am nothing," and "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me," is the startling effect of Jesus upon men. He made them believe they could do the impossible. He showed them possibilities for themselves in

life which made what they had been seem nothing. They, who had stabilized life around moderate virtues, felt very uncomfortable in the awareness of beauty they had never seen before.

But there was a further and most unusual effect He had on the ordinary man. He made men think about themselves when the ideal was being contrasted with the real. This is not a common human reaction.

You may recall in that book *Arrowsmith*, which is still Sinclair Lewis's greatest, how the people of Nautilus received the words of their minister when he preached to them on jealousy, ill temper, selfishness, and pride. That particular Sunday, the minister had spoken on "secret vice rampant in high places." Obviously, the statement was wide enough to be applied as one liked; but no one liked to think of himself. Lewis goes on to speak of the way that "some of the delighted congregation thought he was referring to Mayor Pugh, and some to F. X. Jordan, but wise citizens saw it was a courageous attack on the wicked Dr. Arrowsmith."

The first time I spoke to the patients in a hospital for the insane I asked the doctor in charge whether there were any subjects which it might be well for me to avoid. There seemed to me to be no advantage in needlessly exciting some six hundred people already sufficiently dangerous to



themselves or society so that they had been confined in such a place.

"No," said the doctor, soothingly. "Talk about anything you want to. You see, they do not take it personally. Each one will think you are talking about some other person."

"Doctor," I replied, "if that's a sign of insanity, you had better start enlarging your institution right away."

We become righteously indignant over a Jewish pogrom in Germany without realizing a state of affairs which the world has come to associate with Alabama. We in New York get excited about a famous case of racial injustice in Alabama, without being achingly aware of Harlem. This is a natural human reaction.

It is all the more startling, therefore, to see the effect of Jesus upon men. He made them more than just human. Under the impact of His presence, they found themselves applying His words to their own lives.

"One of you shall betray me."

What did the disciples say—"We know. He means Judas"?

That would have been the reaction of the normal human mind. Yet each man said, "Lord, is it I?"

Jesus was at times a very uncomfortable conversationalist. Ask the rich young ruler. Ask

the lawyer. They could not feel good in His presence. That is not bad grammar. It means literally that they did not feel good any longer. Often they did not know why but they knew the fact. He changed their ideas about themselves and that is not a comfortable experience.

Suppose you were a Pharisee of Jesus' day. Do you think you would have realized that Jesus was right? I doubt if many of the Pharisees ever were convinced that Jesus was right about them. They were good men and knew themselves to be good. Oh, of course (how glibly we use the phrase "of course"!), maybe here and there in little things we might be better. The very conventions of their religion would cause them to admit ritually that they were miserable offenders. But to any questioning of their basic uprightness they did not agree. And until men do agree that Jesus was talking about them when He said, "Ye must be born again," until men see the kingdom of God as an eagerly accepted fundamental change in the conduct of life, something to which they come not from reluctant acquiescence to an outside force but as an inner dynamic, there will remain a barrier between men and God on this earth.

You must by this time be aware that part of my interest in religion as a value in life and part of my interest in religion as the conduct of life is that



Christianity does make changes in the structures of society. That we are concerned about slums, and bread lines, and factory conditions, and wage scales, and saloons, and burlesque shows, and all those things which confine or tarnish life is an inevitable consequence of worshiping God. There is no question in my mind that we shall have better men and women—and a better world—as we eliminate certain things in our social order and create or radically recreate others. We do not and shall not minify the concern and the activity of the followers of Christ in the struggle against inaction and resistance to change which stands in the way of a transformed society worthy of being called "Our Father's World."

What we do want, however, to make clear is that until we, who are the modern Pharisees, are caught by the haunting and awful ache of Jesus' belief in the nature of men and the world, our efforts to change the world may be only like trying to improve a play by shifting the scenery.

Look, for example, on the parable which was once called "The Parable of the Great Surprise." It is not only a parable reminding us that at the Last Judgment we shall be asked what we have done. It sets hauntingly in our minds the awful realization that there is no letup in the application to daily life of the principles of Christ's way.

"As often as ye did it not." Boy Scouts can do

one good deed a day and remain in good standing. Obviously, one good deed is better than none. But Jesus said, "As often as ye did it *not*. . . ." Have you ever noticed that the parable ends with the "did-it-not" picture?

Maybe some Pharisee criticized Him the next day because Jesus was so negative. "Why doesn't He preach a positive note?" you can hear the Pharisees discussing it with one another, exasperated because they had been made to feel so uncomfortable.

But in the religion of Christ the major concern is not what you have done; it is what you have still before you. There is no triumph in the soul until your feet rest on the mountaintop. You must finish the course in your keeping of the faith. Pharisees can point with pride to what they have done. Christians ache in the very fiber of their being because they have not had strength, or desire, or skill to do the things they have not done.

Jesus made men feel that awe-ful, unbearable ache of individual responsibility in the face of an immense and imperfect world. "Lord, is it I?" It is so big as an ideal to face life with, that no wonder men talk themselves out of it.

In the life of Rothschild, famous financier of England, there came a moment of public panic when two things were in danger: the credit of



England and his own personal fortune. A financial panic was on the Exchange because of the fear of war; and men were scrambling to protect their own interests.

Realizing that England was in danger, Rothschild placed all the resources of his wealth to stem the flood of fear. It was apparently not enough. Frantic, his partners urged him to sell—to get out with what he still could save while there was a chance.

“How long,” said Rothschild, “before the Exchange will close?”

“Two hours,” they replied and waited tensely.

“Two hours!” said Rothschild wearily. “I cannot last two hours.”

“Then sell,” they cried eagerly. “One man cannot stem this tide. Sell! England will need strong men tomorrow.”

Rothschild straightened up. “What a man can do in England tomorrow I do not know. I know what a man can do for England today. Buy!”

Jesus never told us that we have to succeed in any moment of time. But the world needs in its travail to have those who are not afraid to try when hope seems gone. Not victory but witness is the Christian’s task, if victory is to be seen some day in the world.

Somehow Jesus made people like you and me

see that. I believe in changing social systems and setups. But the dynamic begins in the individual. Emerson once said: "Every reform was once an idea in one man's mind. Every great movement was once one man's private opinion." A true idea must some day become the common thought of every man. But until it does, those who say they believe it must live it no matter how hopeless it seems.

It means, then, that we cannot hide behind our Corporations, our Party, our Church. We cannot escape responsibility in our system of society, or heredity, or environment. We may not finish, but the beginning of the City of God is in you. *You* are the soul in the "soul-less" corporation in which you try to lose yourself. You are war, and famine, and social injustice. You are politics. It is not The Party. Party loyalty is the dry rot of defeatism. "Oh, what can I do? Let the Party be responsible," we say. But we do not punish the impersonal party with the one personal thing we have—our vote's integrity.

"What, then, am I to do?" comes the question from many a stirred soul. No man can tell you.

As Galileo knelt in prayer in the cathedral in Pisa, no one could force him to see the message of that lamp. It swung there for all. Only Galileo, who was looking for its message, heard—and started science upon a new direction.



Apples had fallen on other heads before Newton's. They had sworn in anger at the injustice of the universe in hurting them; or may eagerly have snatched the luscious fruit for physical satisfaction. The falling apples did not speak to others as one did to him who had wondered how the stars could hold themselves in their courses.

Others had seen the need of England, but Wesley answered her need because he believed that one man can gather around himself other men and through the force of their convictions can spread light and truth to a whole community.

Others had lost their young wives and had spent their lives in bitterness. John Bright made life different for many poor wives and children by the creative experience of that tragedy.

Jesus somehow made men see that life is not static. Its course is not determined. You are the answer to the world's need. The world becomes what you are; and you are what you care about, and think upon, and love.

We are back in memory at a strange moment. They were common stuff—those disciples. There are twelve men just as good in your acquaintance. Do you think you know no one as good as Peter? I'll say you do. Is there no one who understands truth with the gentleness of John? I'll say there is as good as John among

your friends. Are there no sturdy, honest doubters such as Thomas, no simple souls like Andrew? Go down the list and you can match them man for man.

Then through that group, groping and untempered, weak and undisciplined, there came the flash of inspiration in the nature of Christ and their leadership in Him. Quick to Peter, the spokesman of that belief in Christ, came back the prophecy from Jesus' lips: "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

On Peter!—a rock!—This disorganized personality, so full of wishful hopes and untested quality of endurance. On Peter to build the Church? Yes, on man, on this stuff of flesh—on you, weak as you are, blind as you are, insensitive as you are, wobbly as you are; on you, man—the issue is staked. He ventured everything on the fact of man's sonship to the Eternal God.

Let's feel this in a poet's illumination of life as Browning's "Childe Roland" takes that dramatic series of events out of the myths of history to be meat for strong men in these times.

It is the old, old story of the princess snatched by the power of evil and imprisoned in the Dark Tower. The rescue had been attempted by the elder brother, the older generation, and the task declared too difficult. To that abandoned quest



the youngest son Roland, called the Childe, set himself. "Evil is strong, but those who will give their lives are stronger," said Masefield one day in a poem of old Japan. At least Childe Roland was going to try.

Have you ever been up against a proposition where no one saw things which were clear to you? A frozen feeling awaits you as you face the sheer incompetence of men's minds to see. Out of such a feeling comes the slang phrase, "Skip it." What's the use? You have to begin too far back to win out. If only at Versailles, and if only in the Saar, and if only at Geneva, and if only here and there years back—to take the things in all our minds as illustration—we had, and they had, done and not done—but—oh awful *but*—it's too late now and because of the years comes the impotence of the day.

The further Roland went, the more difficult the job seemed. He met long-established barrenness, wanton desolation. As he came up the valley toward the Dark Tower we hear the description.

"I think I never saw such starved ignoble nature."

Then the Dark Tower—menacing, impregnable, the entrenched evil of the world. What could he, a child, do against all this of many generations?

He turns to flee, to run away from the impossible conflict. Then into his mind comes the thought.

"Suddenly it came upon me. This was the place.  
Dunce that I was, not to have seen  
After a lifetime spent training for the sight."

"This was the place." There is action in it. The issue is joined, the cause is clear. Face it. Maybe you won't win. But you are going to try.

There is many a person facing personal temptations who forgets the hidden moment of crisis which can be discovered by them. Useless as their struggle may seem, it is out of their faithfulness to the highest truth they know that the beloved community is gathered.

There is many a mind at this moment confused by the cries of a fearing and desperate world: Abandon the truth you have sworn before God until after the world has passed this worldly crisis. You cannot win now.

You cannot win ever unless you start now to live your belief that years from now—maybe many generations—the final triumph of the way of love will be in the world. Do not be afraid. Hitler cannot conquer, though he may oppress—and for a time control. Hate cannot win. Love is the meaning of life. This is the only truth by which the world becomes a universe and life



makes sense. Destruction may come. It has happened before to the Children of God. We may be again as those who cry out for death as the only peace remaining for us in a degraded world.

But as we face the world we have, which does so obviously deny the will of God and the way of Christ, we must be honest enough with the facts and see well enough the truth, so that we are not afraid to take our stand on a principle we profess to believe.

When you see the issues of life—be not afraid—stand, and as you stand take courage. This is the place you had expected was to come. Quietly take up the cross as it falls across us in the world today and follow Him.

He meant you and me when He said, "One of you will betray me." Do we ask, each in the secret place, "Lord, is it I?" But He also meant you and me when He said to Peter, "Thou shalt follow me afterwards." Do we feel in our hearts, "Lord, it is I"?

Childe Roland expresses something for us:

"There they stood, ranged along the hillsides, met  
To view the last of me, a living frame  
For one more picture! (of failure)  
Dauntless my horn to my lips I set,  
And blew.  
'Child Roland to the Dark Tower came.'"

There is the sound of a trumpet which men hear at times when the miracle of Christ's presence is upon the world. It makes us know that we are called to step into line after Him from the edge of the crowd.



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## CHAPTER 12

### THE REST OF THE STORY

IT is with a sense of loss similar to that which one has almost always at the end of a young people's summer conference or at some gathering where inspiration was mighty and fellowship powerful, that we realize we are at the end of this series of character sketches of the men about Jesus which we have called *As He Passed By*. We must try to sum up our values a bit. The search will have been successful if for you new understanding of yourself and the way of Christ has come. These have been mirrors for us—these men who hesitated on the edge of the crowd around Jesus. We have more than once seen ourselves in them and seen ourselves as others see us. We may have, once in a while, seen ourselves in the eyes of God.

As we come to the end we state again our purpose in this series. We are accustomed to judge Jesus by the inner circle of His disciples—or in some cases the inner circle of His opposition. We talk of Peter and James and John, of Thomas and Judas, of—Matthew and of—of—oh, and

Philip, and, and—oh, who were the rest anyway? Thus we stammer, if we are asked to name the official Twelve. There followed Him great multitudes of people, but we talk of His effect upon the few.

Some became His violent, His passionate partisans. They left all to follow Him. But how about those who were “mindful of that country from whence they came out”?

Some became His bitter enemies, they let nothing stand in the way of their desire to remove Him. But what about those who were too busy or too indifferent to come?

We do not ignore the customary two tests to which we have right to turn and where we find our greatest material for knowledge and data to understand the Christ. But we must look also at the test, a condemnation or a revelation, given by those who choose “neither the high Way nor the low, but in between on the misty flats . . . drift to and fro.” The drifters count. Why do they *drift*? Why *don't* they care? We have asked about Jesus—not only what feelings of partisanship or opposition He arouses, but what does He do to the man on the edge of the crowd?

One thing we have discovered, that He was a troubling personality. He disturbed men! Made them wonder about themselves; made them question life as they knew it. So often in



these men, so far at least as the record of their time shows, there was no change at the moment which men could see. But they did the same old things with a certain difference. Can we call the roll and see?

The rich young ruler.—Like the troubling question, "How much money is enough?", so we can conceive him as never again being able to see his money without hearing the quiet voice of Jesus.

The lawyer.—Would he ever forget: the contrast of his glib words and the scene on the Jericho road?

Barabbas.—For ever afterward the question would stick in his mind: Why me? What did He have which they feared more than they feared me?

Nicodemus.—The haunting words to Caiaphas—"If you and I together should stand with him, for all to see, who knows what we should see?"

Gamaliel, Zacchaeus, and Caiaphas.—Teacher, business man, and minister. How strongly Jesus shook their routines!

Pilate.—How many are the legends of his end, varying all the way from his being saved from disgrace and punishment by wearing the robe of Jesus, to his vain attempt as a broken old man to recall the circumstances of the trial.

Here they all are, and we think of ourselves

standing with them. We are fascinated, haunted by that strange, unforgettable figure of the Christ.

There is this somewhat striking thing about all these men. They were not weaklings. They were rich, or influential, or both. They were powerful in some way. It is the great test of Christianity. What does it do to those who have much and are strong? There is no question of the interest Jesus causes in the weak and the unfortunate. But there is the other question too. It is not enough that men who have nothing should see that having nothing is not of all things most dreadful. It is not enough that desperate men should try His way, because there is no other way they can try. The way of Christ will always have its ragged legions, men on the march because they have nothing to lose.

Ill clad, poorly shod, hungry men will easily flock to a standard where there is something to be gained and nothing to be lost. But truth is not always well served thereby. Desperation demands change, and rightly so, but often that awful fear only overturns the squirrel cage and does not set the captive free.

Those who have much have their desperation too. The desperation of having nothing is often matched by the fear of losing what one has. But when those who have much to lose and only a principle for others to gain, leave the circle of



affluence—I use the word “circle” advisedly—and march out with the ragged legions on the highway of hope, then we see evidenced one of the uplifting moments of man’s life on this earth.

The danger of people of privilege is not necessarily that their hearts will become hard. It is more often that their minds do not grasp how little life is for some people. They do not have imagination enough to be aware of the other person’s world. They are blind and they do not see that they do not see.

Queen Marie Antoinette is an historic and symbolic example of this great tragedy of life. When they told her that the peasants were hungry because they had no bread, she is reported to have said, “Well, then, let them eat cake!” This was not necessarily callousness in feeling. She was more probably ignorantly bewildered. That people should starve seemed impossible to her. Their complaint was an apparently unreasonable preference for bread over cake as the staff of life.

We are going to add a final word about ourselves when these character sketches of the men about Jesus are done. But we turn now to the last word said about Jesus as death touched Him on Golgotha’s dark hill. It is the word of a horrified man.

Maybe “horrified” is too strong a word, for the record says only that the centurion said in an

awed voice, that he said in a frightened voice, that he glorified as he said, or just simply that he said, "Truly, this was a righteous man." It is not going too far, however, to make those suppositions about the centurion which would be rational to the minds of men in his position.

As we look at some of the things our ancestors did we wonder sometimes how in the world they could have thought themselves good. Take, for example, a bit from the literary diary of Ezra Stiles, one of the early presidents of Yale College. When he was a minister in Newport he records with these words the death of one of his parishioners:

"God hath blessed him with good estate, and he and his family have been eminent for hospitality to all and charity to the poor and afflicted. At his death he recommended religion to his children and told them that the world was nothing. The only external blemish on his character was that he was a little addicted to the marvelous in stories of what he had seen in his voyages and travels. But in his dealings he was punctual, upright, and honest, and (except as to the fly in the ointment, this disposition to tell marvelous stories of dangers and travels), in all other things he was of a sober and good moral character, respected and beloved of all, so that he was without enemies. He was concerned for the church con-



sulting its benefit. He was a peaceable man and promoted peace."

It is only by accident that we later discovered that this man was also a slave trader who took his ship to Africa; slipped up on an unsuspecting village; captured by force those whom he could; brought them packed in a loathsome dark hold of his ship to the Southern colonies into which he had to smuggle the slaves; and then returned to his home in Newport to die at last with the halo of holiness about him.

It was only twelve years after this slave captain's eulogized death, that President Stiles was writing vigorously about those who so demeaned religion as to engage in this "most iniquitous traffic in the souls of men."

In that which is but a moment in the life of society, we have turned in horror from former eulogy. What else could one have done, we say, than what we did do? And yet how could we have been so blind as not to see?

It is this, which happens in the life of society, which did happen in a moment in the life of the centurion and which should happen for us as the vision of the true touches our own spirits. The centurion, at least as a symbol, was suddenly in a different world.

It is a beautiful thing to see in his story a certain quality of transforming attractiveness in

Jesus. Perhaps he caught it from the spirit of Jesus on the cross as He talked with the two thieves. Maybe it was His gentleness with the soldier who nailed Him to the cross. We so often forget to be Christlike in our insistence upon Christ's way. To face the issue squarely but not bitterly is not easy. A forced morality is no morality at all. As we grow in understanding of truth, we realize how there is not lasting power in a religion which does not trust its inevitable and unconquerable idea. This is not advocating that we take pressure off man in the insistent facing of how far apart we are in reality from the ideal and how separate we are from God. But so often we do not trust the truth to make its own way with man.

The centurion is a symbol to us of those milestones in which we come to a realization of the truth. Pity the man who has not passed often from life through the agony of death to life again as, in his spiritual pilgrimage, he has made his progress. The centurion who was, was not. The cog became conscious of itself and, horrified, became a cog no longer.

Now, taking what recorded facts we know and using them as background, or perhaps better as backbone, to complete our picture, let us go far beyond the records to carry out a line of thought which we know does happen to us as individuals



reacting to our world. What do you suppose the centurion thought about Jesus as his attitude changed from his first impressions and from possible second thoughts into the deeply rooted convictions of his longer contemplation? Let us plunge right into the scene.

We know this, so far as our records go, that there was such an impression made upon the officer in charge of the execution of Jesus that he said some words of great praise. Two of the accounts, one of which was particularly interested in connecting Jesus with the prophesied deliverer of the people, said that the centurion exclaimed: "This is the Son of God." Mark records this and from Mark, Matthew probably quoted. Luke emphasizes the awed wonder of the professional soldier at the manner in which Jesus died. The centurion had seen many men die and presumably many executed as Jesus was; but never anyone this way. Even as a later historian records his wonder at the way in which Christians met death, saying—"What is it that enters into men which makes them die as these Christians die?" so the centurion recognized the reality of Jesus' hold on life—on its values—its meanings. Only one in whom righteousness is an inner reality could die that way, was his reaction. "Truly," he says, "this was a righteous man."

We depart from the record now as we follow the centurion back to Jerusalem and his quarters. He has reported to his superior and been dismissed. The execution assigned has been completed. He is now off duty.

Now he sits in the army barracks alone. Somehow he does not feel like talking. "No, you go on in town tonight without me, I'm tired," he had said earlier in the evening to his friends.

"What did that middle one have?" he thinks to himself. "He had something I've never seen before. I've seen many of them go up on that old cross and howl the way one of those thieves did, but this man had something. I wish I felt I had it in me.

"'Father, forgive them'—that's what he said. 'Forgive them,' and they were driving the nails in. The priest at last church parade was saying something like what he said. That's all right for a priest to say. It sounds easy enough when the Temple is all quiet and drowsy the way it feels when the priest is droning out the service. But I'll be condemned by Jupiter if it's the same thing when you get out on the Hill of the Skull. He had something. I'd give my chance of becoming tribune to have what he had. He wasn't afraid. That's what got me. Oh, I'm no coward. I guess this wreath of honor they gave me when we were fighting those pesky barbarian



raiders shows that. What a scare they can put into you—I stood up to them all right, and this proves it. But those nails through the hands. It makes me shiver to think of it. ‘Father, forgive them.’ And he meant it too. You can’t tell me that was not real. That lashing with the whip of cords would have taken any play-acting out of a man.”

Then the centurion began to rationalize—even as you and I. Say, what’s the matter with you? Snap out of it. You’re going soft. He was different, that’s all there is to it. He never had my temptations. They say he was a god’s son. Sure, and why should I be thinking about him? You can’t expect a mere mortal to do what a god’s son can do. Besides, life was different for him anyway. He knew what he wanted to do. He wasn’t torn up inside the way I am. I wish I could forget all those crazy ideas about having an ideal empire and could be satisfied to go on with my career in the army. There isn’t any chance of making the world much better anyway, and I might as well be top dog. He was different because he never had to face my temptations. Oh, I’m going to stop worrying my head about him. He just does not know the things I’m up against.

“Oh, hello, Gaius,” he looks up as another centurion drops down beside him. “What’s new?”

“Nothing much,” says Gaius, and then sud-

denly, "Oh, yes—there is. Did you hear the story Marcellus is telling about that prisoner you executed last night? It's a good joke on you, you old sentimentalist. Marcellus says you don't know what you are talking about in calling him brave. He was up in Gethsemane gardens last night. You know those wild gardens outside the city wall. He was getting a bit of fresh air—so he says. Anyway, he was sitting under a tree watching those dark clouds and wondering if it was going to break up the oppressive feeling in the air, when along came this fellow—what do you call him?—yes, Jesus—the Christ, those followers of his call him. I can't keep up with all these religious ideas. And Marcellus said he was praying to his God to help him escape the execution. He knew we had orders to pick him up and he kept asking his God not to allow it. Seems like he didn't have much hope that his followers could carry on if we got him. Guess he was right about that too. Pretty weak-kneed bunch. Anyway, he pleads for another chance to preach his ideas to people. Honest, Marcellus says he sounded as edgy as we feel when the Goths are on a raid. 'Father, remove this cup from me,' he kept saying. 'Father, remove this cup from me.' Marcellus said to tell you that's the kind of bravery your hero has."

Down around his head tumbled the temple of



escape the centurion had raised. Out of what he had known he could make an ideal—could worship a hero—a god. Could say from afar—he was a wonder; but he could be; he never was tempted as I am. But now he had the rest of the story. He had heard about Gethsemane.

I wish we had the rest of his story. Did it do for him what it has done to so many men, who have groped out into "that dark, that blind, that crooked street, called by the crowd Obscurity," because they had "a tryst with truth," going into the wilderness with what they believed, as Kurano said it in "The Faithful"?

"Oh, yes," we can hear the centurion say, although he did not spell the "yes" with three letters and when he said it he dragged it out into a long and derisive word. "That is all very fine, but a man has to live." Then he heard about Gethsemane.

"I've got some rights," he objected to his own inner conflict. "After all, a man has to look out for himself." And then he heard about Gethsemane.

"He was not tempted as I am"—then he heard about Gethsemane.

The centurion strode across the stage of man's attention and said one line. I wish Calvary had not been the only scene in which his face appeared. I wish we knew the rest of his story.

Can you see him in the crowd as the disciples came back from despair? Maybe he was one of the guard which arrested Peter and John. Men did renounce the Roman Army for conscience and Christ in those early days. Was he among them?

Did the haunting sense of life worth-while ever beyond the horizon, keep him going until he found it? Did he curse the day he had heard about Gethsemane because his old care-free life was gone? Did he feel a life divided as never had life been strained before and which made him cry, as Thomas à Kempis did later, "Alas, what kind of life is this against which I must struggle as long as I live?" Struggle—no not always. Only until one's restless heart finds peace at last in following the light one has, out into the light of life.

Don't you wish you knew! What the centurion became we do not know, but that he was not the same we can believe because so few people did escape the impact of that life which is the light of men even when they hover hesitatingly on the edge of the crowd.



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## CHAPTER 13

### THE LONELY MAN

WE know the word is right as soon as we hear it and wonder that we did not phrase it so ourselves. The Lonely Man. We do not think about Him much, that Christ who walked the common road of men and found so few to understand a little, while so many did not understand at all. He *is* the Lonely Man who, we have forgotten if we ever knew, still walks the world.

It was Josephine Peabody's vein of understanding running through her play, "The Piper"—that one of Hamelin town, you remember—which stuck that haunting phrase in my mind. The Lonely Man—I must give you setting for it, since you may not have read the play.

The Pied Piper of Hamelin has returned to the ratless town from the Yser's banks. Three days have gone and a Christmas Eve not-even-a-mouse-stirring sort of peace was on the scarce believing villagers. Truly the rats were gone. But we who live in rat-infested towns—to think symbolically—profess sometimes in prayers and

promises a willingness to give up what-we-have-for-what-we-want, that is only a sentimentalism. How often have we prayed our passion for a new world, or sung:

“Were the whole realm of nature mine,  
That were a present far too small;  
Love so amazing, so divine,  
Demands my soul, my life, my all.”

But when the processes of change approached our privilege or our possessions, we could not give up even our fears, to say nothing of the fringe of our things. Oh, be sympathetic with the burghers of Hamelin town! A thousand guilders seems a lot when the depressing rats are gone.

We do not forget, in philosophizing, where we are. It is the market square of Hamelin. The people have retired to the church to bless with idle prayers their self-ful lives miraculously released from the hordes of the rats; and the little lame boy and the Piper remain outside. Yes, tragically outside. Looking up at the sober face of the Piper, the little lame boy says in explanation of why he does not go to the church with the others, “Mother lets me stay here with the Lonely Man.”

“The Lonely Man?” questions the Piper, then understands as the boy looks at the statue of the Christ.



"What do you wait to see?" the question comes.  
"To see Him smile."

There you have the revealing, haunting sense of the constant presence of the Christ whom we profess is Master—The Lonely Man who still walks the world.

"Why should He not be lonely?" we ask ourselves. "What reason have we given Him to smile?" I care not where you set your canvas. Stand on the mountaintop where you can view the kingdoms of the world and their ambitions, or before the microcosmic miniature of human nature, your own inner soul. Then ask the question: What reason do you see for the Lonely Man to smile?

We must think not of what Jesus would do if He were walking in this fleshly world—that question has a changeable answer, and we are often fooled into doing what He would not do now, thinking about what He did then. We should think, rather, of what He must *think* (not what He would do, but what He must think) as He looks upon the world today.

The pathos of our topic—The Lonely Man—has chapter and verse given to it by that revelation of a perennial loneliness which we find in John. Writing about the fundamentally Joyful Man who was nevertheless acquainted with grief, John paints the picture of one of the last talks

Jesus had with His closest followers. Poor Peter!—I do hope we are like him. It would be tragic were we to change the carelessness about being so often mistaken for the carefulness of a Gamaliel who was so wise in his inertia. Poor Peter was looking distressed one day because Jesus had told him honestly that all his fine professions were going to meet failure before the night was out. To that troubled face Jesus spoke. "Let not your heart be troubled—Ye believe in God, believe also in me." I'll send the comfort of truth—which the world doesn't even know it does not know. But you know it. It is in you and it shall be with you. "Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. For lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."

As His soul soared to that great climax of faith and hope, there came from Philip the stab of unconscious misunderstanding. Wonderful vision of progress—truth—and the abundant life!

"Oh, show us that way," Thomas had cried. What?—you would correct me and say that Thomas said no such thing. That he said instead hopelessly, pessimistically—"Lord, we know not whither thou goest—you haven't made the way plain to us at all." If you insist on what the words seem to say, I'll have to say you're right. But have you never heard "the elusive unbearable



ache," as Donn Byrne calls it, that thrust of passionate desire for perfection beneath the bitter and doubting words of men? Jesus recognized it in Thomas's question.

But Philip's stab was worse—"Oh, yes"—eagerly he cried—"show us and we are satisfied." "Show you!" The Lord turned and looked on Philip, and suddenly we see again the Lonely Man. "Have I been so long time with you and yet hast thou not known me, Philip?" The eyes of the Lonely Man bring echoes of His voice when we are sensitive to the meaning of His vision for the world.

With the sense of those eyes of the Lonely Man upon you—hauntingly so, if we dare to remember through the years that picture as He stands outside the door—I'm going to put before your minds for you to take in, if you will, two areas of your life and mine, where we may cause the Lonely Man to smile—one area of action and one of attitude.

The first would in ordinary times wait until Armistice or Memorial Day for its emphasis, and must, of course, come then in some measure again. But times are too much like the days of 1914 to allow us to wait for the conventional season. The mind of Christ is thinking about men at war.

The issue between Christ and Mars is not

clear to the man in the office building. Let's not be sentimental about this so-called Christian civilization. When the economic advantage which is the meaning of life to the ordinary man makes him see in an Ethiopian king's danger opportunity to secure oil concessions for himself, the man in the office building *has* no issue between Christ and Mars to face. *His* gods do not ask him what that red stream is that mixes with the stream of oil. It seems strange that they should know their history so little that they would not know that millions of men would in the name of a nation's honor be called to collect their money. We thought we were disillusioned about the sensitiveness of conscience of a certain type of business man by the revelations in the munitions industry. But we must not be shocked about a recurring experience which further reminds us that the man in the office building is often insensitive to the issue between Christ and Mars.

But for the Church the issue is. How long it will remain sensitive history gives both hope and despair. If I were in prophetic mood today, the guess would be hopeful for reasons that I cannot now go into. But facing the situation as it now is, the issue is there. An issue so academic a few years ago that some people felt impatient that we wasted time upon it, is now, and in the next years will be, more and more the bread-and-butter de-



cision of the present day. Where do you stand on war? Can you set your face toward peace between nations in the name of the Christ we profess and the universal Fatherhood He revealed, walking the common road in all its inconsistencies—because no man can escape from being a part of the sin of a world at war? A stand against war is not the attainment of the Way of Christ, but on the way it is a milestone. There are other and worse denials in the world of that basic concept of Christianity, the worth of the personality of man. But this issue at least is clear—its violation is blatant.

The Lonely Man will smile when No Man's Land, that dangerous place of the spirit between nations at war, is filled—if war should come—by a group of His followers who refuse to bow the knee to Baal.

The times demanded that special word on an area where any day action for the Christian might be demanded. But the second area is of greater basic importance. The Lonely Man is thinking more of what our attitudes may be than about some particular action.

Ask yourself, therefore, what are the areas of your discontent. Regular attendants at church should not fail to find an emphasis there that discontent is the sign of the optimist. It is the pessimist, not truly believing in the basic goodness of

man and his capacity for perfection, who lets himself become content with that element and those inconsistencies in our common life which logically deny our professed faith. Robinson (it's grand to die with life still on the flood tide—but the world is poorer for his going)—Robinson, in one of his later poems, "Matthias at the Door," pictures his main character early in the poem with these words, "He was in harmony . . . even with chaos." Can't you see him? So like us who scarcely know the worlds—not world—the worlds we live in. "He was in harmony even with chaos."

One has no right to be—in harmony with chaos. One man, made bitter by injustice you might rightly say, and yet, even though he could not hold his knowledge of the truth so that it broke him, nevertheless still voiced the truth as he said to Matthias—"You are not sound in your serenity."

We know that. That is the glory of the Church's fellowship. Read the history of it, the spirit of its founding. As I've walked the mountain trails with the cleansing perspective that such a place apart gives (it was an Irish poet who called a mountain peak "the place apart"), I have felt ever more surely the strength of the fiber of a Church whose deep concern is a determined discontent, a stern and stubborn resolve,



that it shall show to our day the different meaning of the way of Christ from ways men claim are the natures of man.

It is a familiar poem which puts a final stroke upon the rapid sketch that artists have tried to give of that fleeting experience of the Christ.

"A Poet lived in Galilee  
Whose mother dearly knew him—  
And his beauty like a cooling tree  
Drew many people to him.

"He loved the speech of simple men  
And little children's laughter;  
He came, they always came again,  
He went—they followed after.

"He had sweet-hearted things to say,  
And he was solemn only  
When people were unkind . . . that day;  
He'd stand there, straight and lonely,

"And tell them what they ought to do;  
'Love other folk,' he pleaded,  
'As you love me and I love you!'  
But almost no one heeded.

"A Poet died in Galilee;  
They stared at him and slew him . . .  
What would they do to you and me  
If we should say we knew him?"<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "The Poet of Galilee," from *Grenstone Poems*, by Witter Bynner. Reprinted by permission of Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., New York.

He walks the world—the Lonely Man—and if we see Him, we find the question coming, “What reason have we given Him to smile?” Inheritors of a great tradition, we people who profess Christ today have power to do what the Church in some days has not had a chance to do. Will He whom we profess as Master be less lonely in a world in chaos because our lives are set on obedience to His way?

In days of insecurity men walk with timid feet. They have lived their best so intermittently that when they need it most they have only the mediocre in its place. What epitaph for a world’s lost opportunity! What tragedy if it were said of us, “They lived their best so intermittently that when they needed it most, they had only the mediocre in its place”!

Yet we have a feeling that in the darkness of the world’s lost hope we may be a light—the light of courage, the light of unquenchable conviction—the light of dancing joy—to guide the Church and the world a bit. Laying aside every weight and the fear which doth so easily beset us—let us move forward then on the broad ways of the world to where the Lonely Man can look on us—and woe betide us if all He says is “Have I been so long time with you and yet hast thou not known me?” as we stand there hesitating on the edge of the crowd.

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